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L E T T E R
T O T H E

Protestant-Dissenters

I N T H E
PARISH of BALLYKELLY,

I n I R E L A N D ;

Occasioned by their Objections against their late
M I N I S T E R .

In this Letter there is an Attempt, upon Scriptural and Protestant Principles, to show what Regard is due to human Articles of Faith ; and also, to explain several Particulars relative to the Doctrines of Original Sin and Election, &c.

—*To the Law and to the Testimony : If they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no Light in them. Ifai. viii. 20.*

O Freedom ! sov'reign Boon of Heaven,
Great Charter with our Being given,
For which the Patriot and the Sage
Have plann'd, have bled, thro' every Age !
High Privilege of human Race,
Beyond a mortal Monarch's Grace,
Who cou'd not give, nor can reclaim,
What but from God immediate came.

A Fragment by Mr. MALLEY.

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L E T T E R, &c.

GENTLEMEN,

WITH the most hearty desire to contribute somewhat to your improvement, I enter upon the consideration of those objections which some of your number were pleased to make to my ministerial labours. Such of them as would lead only to personal altercation are designedly omitted.—The public is no way concerned in matters of this kind, and, if possible, should never be made a party in them. But it is highly proper for all to consider with the utmost care, upon what terms we ought to associate as Christians, and to have just and honourable conceptions of our Governor and Judge. To fix your attention upon these important subjects is all that is meant by this letter. And that it may not appear altogether impertinent to those unacquainted with the occasion of it, it is necessary to inform them in general that the writer of it was, a few years ago, invited by the Congregation of Protestant Dissenters here addressed, to be their Minister. But from the discharge of what appeared to him to be his duty, some of them took handle of suspicion that he was not sound in the faith. From his best endeavours to remove these suspicions, their zealous apprehensions increased to such a pitch, that many of them no longer attended upon his instructions, nor thought him fit to preside among them in divine worship. Accordingly, they commenced a prosecution against him before the Judicatories of their Church, which was finally determined by the General Synod of Ulster. And this determination being in his favour, he continued for some months to perform the duties of his function there; but finding his usefulness diminished and his peace interrupted by the mutual animosities that had unhappily arisen among them, he judged it expedient to give up his charge of them, in order to extricate himself from such a scene of strife and contention, and to prevent the division that was likely to ensue. This he also regarded as the most probable

bable way of bringing them to consider things coolly and to examine those opinions calmly which were the subject of difference between him and them. To assist them in this is the design of his present application to them, which he hopes they will look upon as the most incontestible proof he can give of his continued friendship and constant disposition to promote their present and eternal felicity.

The objections are ranged in such an order as may be most conducive to prepare for and illustrate the remarks upon them.—First, you have that upon the use I made of the confession of Faith ; and then, those which call for an explanation of some things relating to the doctrine of original sin, &c.

It is not intended to give a large or full explication of any doctrine : neither shall I confine myself merely to answer your objections. This was done in the most concise manner before the Synod, because I did not pretend to instruct my Fathers in the Ministry, but would gladly lay before you, in a plain method, such hints as may excite you to double diligence in the use of your bibles and your own minds.

The consideration of these objections was first undertaken from a sole view to some friends : but upon running over the several particulars, I find them likely to grow to such a bulk, that in manuscript, I apprehend, they would not answer my design even to a few. Besides, the subject must lead one to speak of some things that may be of use to other well-meaning Christians, many of whom are too often kept in the dark about what they are highly concerned to know. I have therefore determined to get this letter printed ; not indeed without the diffidence natural to those who are obliged to question opinions supported by the prejudices of some and the interest of others. The observation of Solomon that *the fear of man bringeth a snare*, is no where more remarkably verified than in religious matters. But surely to be governed by this principle is a false, vicious modesty which it is the business of cool reflection to overcome. Whatever interpretation any of my fellow creatures may put upon my readiness to assist the teachable part of them, yet I know whom I serve,—a master that will reward all my works and labours of love.

The liberty of examining our principles, and of professing our faith and hope, without danger of imprisonment or murder, we generally agree to extoll in words. But is not even this choice gift of heaven perfectly insignificant, unless we make a discreet use

use of it ? with regard to all the purposes of social improvement, might we not live as profitably in Portugal, trembling under the terrors of the inquisition, as in Ireland, if the inconveniences that attend our acquiring and publishing the truth are sufficient to make us slothful or silent ? in every country, no doubt, the truth will always excite the resentment of those men whose principles or pursuits cannot bear its piercing eye ; while an easy compliance with their views will alone secure their friendship, but whatever opinion the world may entertain of that left-handed wisdom which usurps the name of prudence, or whatever apparent advantages it may bring along with it, yet, it is only by despising and violating its wretched maxims, that ignorance can be banished, error detected or truth propagated. The wisdom that is from above, as it is pure, peaceable and gentle, so it is full of *benevolence* and *good fruits*, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

From many of you my own experience makes me hope for a patient hearing, and a suitable improvement of what is here laid before you. Nothing indeed can be more reasonable, than this, and few things more hurtful than withholding it. How great the guilt and danger of neglecting the means of information ! or of despising the truth ! we are well assured in the sacred scriptures, that when men believe not the truth, when they are not impartial and diligent to know it, but slight and overlook the means of obtaining it, then God in his righteous judgment sends them strong delusions to believe lies. In this there is nothing severe. It is the natural consequence of an abused understanding. Our Maker bestows upon us the power of discerning between truth and error, with his word to assist us in our enquiries. But these, like all other blessings, when neglected, grow useless. And can we imagine it is consistent with the wisdom of God, or a fit method to promote the designs of his government, after our neglect of these talents, to work new miracles perpetually for our instruction ? or to force the truth upon us against our will ? no ; we have Moses and the Prophets ; we have Christ and his Apostles : let us hear them. As the truth is worth pursuing with the greatest assiduity, and amply repays all its faithful votaries, so it disdains to obtrude itself upon the careless or the unworthy. If we would find this precious metal amidst the huge heaps of rubbish it is often blended with, we must search for it as for hidden treasure. What Solomon has observed of wisdom may, with equal propriety, be applied to truth : *it loves them that love it, and they that seek it early shall find*

find it. A person of diligence and sincerity may not indeed be free from all mistakes, but shall assuredly possess what truths are necessary to direct the temper and actions, and to prepare him for life eternal: while want of care, or of singleness of heart, may engage us to believe lies, may involve us in such mistakes as shall prove fatal to our present comfort and virtue, or endanger our future felicity. There is a possibility of being deceived to our own destruction. Our talents are taken from us merely by our neglect or dishonest use of them. Of this fixed rule of the divine government the history of the world affords many awful instances. The character and conduct of the Jews in our Saviour's time is a picture that should be frequently present to our minds. They gloried in their superior understanding; and yet, under a blind attachment to the *traditions of the Elders and the commandments of men*, they contemptuously rejected the clearest evidence of the truth, 'till at last with wicked hands they crucified the Lord of life; and for no other reason but because he told them the truth which they hated. How instructive a lesson to every succeeding age!

You may believe that I shall speak in love what appears to me to be the truth, without the least regard to the different factions or worldly combinations that have been formed among men under the sacred name of Christianity. And it is hoped that, on your part, you'll not refuse to be instructed, but receive the truth in the love of it and for its own sake. It is not expected you'll take any thing upon my authority; no; this would be too high a compliment to any mortal. Consider the evidence presented to your minds from the word of God or your own experience. To the light there shining direct your eyes. It is not my province to be Lord of your consciences, but a helper of your joy. No man is worthy to have any followers in religion. Follow Christ.—Remember that he is our common Master, and all we, his disciples, without exception, are brethren. We are members of one body, and for our opinions or practices, in matters merely religious, are accountable to none but our head. Upon every article *I speak as to wise men, judge ye what I say.*

It is only requested that no settled judgment be formed about any particular, until the whole be impartially considered; because it is apprehended the several parts will receive additional light from each other. And let it be attended to, in order to hinder unjust reflections upon others, that there may be several opinions advanced

advanced here which there was no occasion to be particular about before the Synod.

Without any further preface I shall set down the objections to be considered, beginning with that concerning the confession of faith, as being the foundation of the whole.

Obj. Upon all occasions Mr. Nelson professes himself a most inveterate enemy of all human compositions of every kind ; nay, the confession of faith he is in a great measure laying aside. For being told it gave great offence to his people not to bind the parents at Baptism to educate their children in the principles of it, and to declare it was the confession of their faith, he replied, it was contrary to his conscience, and he tho't it a sin. Now, as this is at least a term of ministerial communion, we cannot see how it would be a sin in him to bind his hearers to educate their children in the principles of it.

R. Here is a strange accusation, that I profess myself an enemy of all human compositions of every kind ! Such of you as have attended to what I have ever said upon this subject, might have known, that I only profess myself an enemy to whatever is erroneous, though recommended by the most learned and venerable of the sons of men, but the friend of whatever is just and true, though found in the Alcoran. This, however, is a good introduction to the charge of 'laying aside the confession of faith.'—But how does this appear ? it must either be from what I have said, or from the use I have made of it. Now, the worst I have at any time said or thought of these Authors, is, that they were fallible mortals like ourselves, that we have an equal right, and are under equal obligations with them to search the scriptures, to take nothing upon trust, but to consult the revealed will of God upon every subject in religion, and to be governed by that alone. The Bible indeed I take to be the better book of the two, but shall content myself with confirming these sentiments from the Confession itself, Ch. 20, Sect. 2. 'God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men that are in any thing *contrary* to his word, or *beside* it in matters of faith or worship : so that to believe such doctrines, and obey such commandments out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience : and the requiring an absolute and blind obedience, is to *destroy* liberty of conscience and *reason* also.' With Ch. 31st, Sect. 4th, 'All Synods and Councils since the Apostles times,——may err :——therefore they are not to be a rule of faith or practice, but used as an *help* in both.'

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These are glorious strains, worthy of Protestants : if all of different denominations, who assume this name, were governed by these principles, their conduct would be consistent, their religion truly honourable, and they themselves so far virtuous and happy : there would be nothing but peace within their walls, and prosperity in their palaces. In short, the authors of these sentiments deserve to be held in sweet and everlasting remembrance by all the lovers of truth, by all the friends of that liberty with which Christ hath made us free : however their writings since their time have been abused to serve the vilest purposes, yet certainly, they who say such things, never intended to enslave the consciences of other men. No ; the detestable practice they renounce with abhorrence : if we believe themselves, they are not to be put in God's place, nor treated as if they were infallible. These declarations of theirs should enlighten and reform such men as profess the highest regard for these authors, and yet directly oppose their instructions upon the manner of using them, and the credit that is due to any human articles of faith.

This confession you assert I am in a great measure laying aside ; and this you found upon my having omitted and refused to make it a term of religious communion : but is this laying aside any thing more than the *abuse* of it ?* don't I always at Baptism, recommend this book to parents, agreeable to the principles there taught, as a *help* in faith and practice ? with what sense or truth then can it be affirmed that I lay it aside, while I follow its own directions ? where now is the consistency of your conduct ? you profess to believe this book, and to be zealous about it too, and yet condemn me for acting according to it ! it declares that nothing of this kind is to be made a *rule of faith or practice*, and you blame me for not binding Christians to educate their children in the principles of it ; which would be making a *rule* of it in the strictest sense.

It may be doubted whether most creeds and confessions, even where they contain nothing but the truth, be so well calculated for the instruction of young people, as the sacred scriptures : their manner of expression is generally too abstracted to be readily entered into by a youthful giddy mind : for the illustration of this, let us attend to the answer given to this question in our shorter catechism : ' What is God ?' Ans. ' God is a spirit, infinite, eternal

* We do not find that the authors of it excluded the great number of the same assembly who did not agree to it, nor that it was a term of communion in Scotland for above forty years after it was composed, nor in Ireland for fifteen years longer.

nal and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.' To the justness of this I have no objection. It is an excellent summary of the divine perfections. Would to God it were always present to our minds in our reasonings concerning the divine conduct !* But is it readily apprehended by a mind that has not yet formed exact notions of what *holiness, equity, wisdom or goodness* are in themselves? Would it not affect a child more to be acquainted with the actions of God, related in sacred history, where instruction and entertainment are agreeably intermixed? A man's real character is best known by his actions, and so is the character of God himself. This method of engaging the attention of youth, is the more necessary, that in this period of life their judgments are weak, but their memories very tenacious of interesting facts. Let a child open the bible, where the story of Joseph is told with such a charming simplicity, and how clearly will he be convinced, that in the most gloomy dispensations, God is the never-failing friend of the righteous, while vice in the greatest pomp is the object of his abhorrence. In what catechism shall we find a dry catalogue of the divine perfections so well adapted to make a lasting impression upon the minds of youth, that in the practice of virtue they may be assured to continue the favourites of heaven, even in the deepest distress, and sooner or later to be delivered from it all, and crowned with glory?

There are other things in our catechism much more above the capacities of children. In answer to the first question we are told

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* Did not these Gentlemen themselves soon forget this account of the divine perfections? May not this be readily perceived by any person who is not prepossessed with some human scheme of divinity? A page or two after this, they tell us, that by the sin of the first man and woman *all mankind are under God's wrath and curse, liable---to the pains of hell forever!* Now, ye unprejudiced, judge ye not of yourselves, that *which is right*? Can this be the result of *infinite justice or equity*? In answer to the next question, I believe it is, they inform us, that God has elected *some* only out of this fearful situation: and in the confession they explain themselves more fully by assuring us, that from eternity he decreed all the rest to everlasting death. O horrid thought! Does this appear to you to be *infinite goodness*? If a man of a fruitful invention were to sit down and paint a character of the most consummate injustice and malevolence, what actions more proper for this purpose would he ascribe to it? How unmeaning is it to tell young people, in general words, that God is infinite in justice and goodness, while they are immediately informed of such actions done by him, as must make them *feel* irresistably, that the object of their worship violates the most obvious dictates of equity and goodness? Can such a character inspire their hearts with love, confidence, or true veneration? Can they really *love* what must appear to them *hateful*, or at best, the object only of their dread and fear? There is much reason to believe, that, from the corruptions soon introduced into Christianity, the bulk of the Christian world for thirteen hundred years past have not worshipped the *true* God, but one of their own invention. This perhaps is one reason why people have generally *felt* devotion to be a joyless, disagreeable service, which they have either neglected entirely, or attended upon chiefly from fear, instead of that unspeakable delight which must possess the sensible mind adoring a God of unerring wisdom and almighty power, under the influence of everlasting love and perfect equity: and how shall we arrive at this pleasing affection, without returning from the confused inventions of men to the word of God, where he has revealed himself to us under the most amiable and endearing character?

that the chief end of man is to glorify God : a most certain truth. But you might as well speak Hebrew to a child. How many persons, when grown up, have clear notions of what is meant by glorifying God ? or of the nature or end of man ? in short, the first part of this catechism is evidently wrote in such scholastic language upon the different subjects of controversial divinity, where the learned have never been able to understand one another, nor themselves, that for real instruction you might as well send youth to the darkest problem in Algebra. Some indeed lay it down as a principle, that children should store their memories with words at first, from a presumption that they will come to understand them afterwards. But, besides the disagreeable impression such a drudgery must make upon a young mind, which is of more consequence than we generally attend to, is it not the original design of words to convey the knowledge of the things signified by them ? what sense then is there in separating the one from the other : or in stringing words together without any regard to the meaning of them ? Is there any thing worth knowing but may be expressed in language plain enough to be understood by every mind that can enter into the subject spoken of ? until it grows capable of the one, why should the other be pressed upon it ? we can all see the absurdity of giving a child food that is too strong for its digestive powers. But is it not equally applicable to the mind and the body, that there should be *milk for babes* ? one obvious mischief arising from the violation of this rule is, that by the familiar use and frequent repetition of meer words, people are insensibly led to imagine, that they understand them. Hence the mind, without perceiving it, is often stored with unmeaning sounds and conceit instead of knowledge ; or, which is still worse, where the language is plain, but the sentiment false, learners rashly swallow it before their judgments are ripened, and carry these notions to the bible as principles of Christianity.

A lady in this kingdom some time ago, having a Negroe servant, was charitable enough to desire he might be instructed in the Christian religion ; for this purpose she put him under the care of a teacher, who according to custom furnished him with catechisms, commented upon them, and made a favourable report of the quickness of his understanding : this the pious lady, in the joy of her heart for saving a soul, mentioned to a clergyman of her acquaintance, adding her request, that he would examine her servant ; with this he readily complied, and asked such simple questions

questions as these, "Who was the author of the Christian religion?" "Where Jesus Christ came from?" or, "What he came to do in the world?" To none of which there was any reply made. My lad, says the clergyman, I have been informed you understand the principles of Christianity; and so I do, sir, returns the other; and pray, says the parson, what are these principles? To which he replied, expressing his opinions in his own words from the confusion he was in, these, sir, are the principles of the Christian Religion, *there was an old man and an old woman that robb'd an orchard long ago, and for this we are all damn'd ever since.*—A lovely religion to be sure, if these are the principles of it! what opinion would the poor Negroe, from the meer light of nature, entertain of the equity or goodness of the judge of all the earth, of whom he was taught to believe such things? Certainly, however he might be afraid to speak it out, yet he would not in his heart esteem him much above the gods he had formerly worshipped; perhaps not equal to them, for this plain reason, that he had probably never heard of their doing such a *wicked* thing. But Jesus never taught this as a principle of his Holy Religion; his instructions, however, are not put into the hands of learners. A strange backward method is here observed by most Christians, to which they are bound with a pious care by their teachers. They learn their religion from their several manuals, and then bring the Bible to speak their sense; instead of taking their religious sentiments immediately from the Bible itself: this is the fruitful source of all the errors keenly maintained in the world. A cask long retains the flavour of the liquor first put into it; but it is much more difficult to purify the human mind from the first impressions, however foul they may be.

In the mean time, it is not intended to deny, that catechisms, wrote in a manner suited to the capacities of youth, may be used as *helps*; nay, they may be put into the hands of learners with advantage, provided that a proper use be made of them; but as they are all composed by fallible men, it is evident a right use cannot be made of them, unless parents are at liberty to point out to their families such passages as are either ill expressed, or contrary to sound doctrine: And this, without any tumult, or cry of heresy about the matter. To use the compositions of men otherwise, or to make a rule of them, appears to be as complete popery as ever was professed or practised at Rome. For what other use do the papists make of the decisions of their church? And was it
not

not the imitation of them in this particular that first defaced the glory of the Reformation? and engaged nominal Protestants to hate, excommunicate and murder one another?

But you cannot see how it would be a sin in me to make this use of the Westminster-Confession. This indeed may be. The only reason you mention for not *seeing* this practice to be a *sin* is, that it is a term of ministerial communion. Here it is necessary to inform you of some facts relative to subscription in the Synod, with which you seem to be unacquainted. At a time when zeal for human creeds ran high enough, there was an Act made, intitled the Pacific Act: the Purport of which was that Candidates for the Ministry shall be allowed to explain or reason upon any proposition in the Confession which they may apprehend to be doubtful or erroneous; or to give their opinion of it in general: after which the Ministers are to judge of their fitness to be licensed. Now, were you the persons that called upon me to subscribe? you'll not pretend you were. Do you know then in what sense, or with what limitations I subscribed this confession?

It also deserves your attention, that there never was an Act of the Synod for making the Confession a term of Christian communion. And what could hinder this, but a belief that such a use of it was sinful? yet the members of the Synod had all subscribed it themselves in *some sense*; or perhaps with a latitude authorized by common custom and consent. Among other reasons, the Clergy expected a more perfect acquaintance with the contents of it from one another, than could be looked for from the bulk of the people. This gave rise to the distinction between *Ministerial* and *Christian* communion.* 'Tis true, several Ministers

* It may be doubted, however, whether there be much in this distinction: Are not the Ministers of the Gospel Christians? At least, ought they not to be such? Is not this the highest character men can hope to arrive at? In the *New Testament*, do we find any difference between the terms upon which the Pastors and their flocks joined together in the service of Christ? If the place where this difference is made, cannot be shewn, the conclusion is obvious. What doctrine in the Bible would it oppose, or what rule in the Confession would it contradict, if there were no subscription required of that part of Christians called the Clergy, more than from that denominated the Laity? The Authors of this Confession seem to have known as little of this distinction, as the writers of the New-Testament: They indeed overthrow it, as far as their authority is regarded. Agreeable to their generous, enlarged sentiments upon this subject, they tell us, chap. 26, sect. 2, 'that the communion or fellowship of saints by profession, is to be extended, as God offereth opportunity to all those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.' If the admirers of this Confession among the Clergy, who profess to be saints, would act up to this *Confession principle*, in their conduct to all those in the Ministry, who also profess to be saints, might they not extol this Confession with a better grace, than while in their practice they are trampling it under foot? Might not this do much good in many respects? especially, since the people are so ready, from a method of subscribing, in itself perhaps innocent, to quarrel with their Ministers for exposing, or even for being silent about the errors contained in this Confession.---

nisters make a different use of this Confession, calling upon those who know little about it to declare that they believe it. But these, it is manifest, are *volunteers in superstition*, without any law, human or divine, to support them.

But without spending more time about what has been enacted or practised, let us attend to what is of far greater importance, to such considerations from scripture and reason as may enable us to judge, whether it be a sin to make parents declare any human System of Articles to be a Confession of their faith, and to bind them to educate their children in the principles thereof.

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From the moment this happens, they can no longer reap any great benefit from the best instructions of the most able and faithful Ministers. This deserves the attention of all who wish well to their fellow-creatures ; why should not every obstacle to intellectual improvement be removed from among Protestants ?

The Author of a late pamphlet, intitled, *Remarks upon the terms of Church Communion, published by the reformed Presbytery*, has indeed preserved this distinction in words ; but his reasoning seems to conclude as strongly against making the Confession a term of communion among Ministers, as among the Laity. He mentions, it is true, a commandment of men for the one above the other. He observes, that this Confession was declared to be a term of Ministerial Communion in Scotland, in the year 1690, and in Ireland in 1705, but several things in this pamphlet may lead us to believe that the Author of it is no slave to human inventions in religion. In the preface he observes that ' such as make sinful inclosures about themselves, by imposing unscriptural terms of religious communion upon the members of their church, are very unjustifiable : ' and at the foot of the 19th page, he has these memorable words, ' Now, from what hath been said concerning these terms of communion, it appears to me, that some of them are unscriptural ; they have no foundation in the word of God, and consequently are human inventions.' But if this be a sufficient reason for rejecting them, what scripture is there for making the Confession a term of Ministerial more than of Christian communion ? What foundation is there in the word of God for the one above the other ? Are not both these uses of the Confession *human inventions*, even in this Author's account ? Why then shall we renounce this practice in the one case, *because it is a human invention*, and retain it in the other, though it bears the *same character* ? Thou that sayest ' unscriptural terms of religious communion are sinful inclosures,' dost thou plead for the observance of human inventions ? This can scarcely be admitted ; for our Author farther remarks, in language that should be wrote in letters of gold ; in language that should be wrote upon the hearts and reduced to practice in the conduct of all who desire to promote the honour of our common Christianity, or the peace and happiness of society. Unscriptural terms, he observes, " are the fruit and consequences of narrow principles, that are the occasion of creating schisms and divisions in the Church ; accordingly, the reformed Presbytery is now rent and divided into two parties, who will not keep communion with one another, and some that were their adherents have deserted both sorts of their Ministers." He might have added with equal justice, that the influence of these narrow principles is by no means confined to the reformed Presbytery, but hath reached all over the Christian world. Without insisting upon the other divisions of Protestants, which all arose from their requiring unscriptural terms of one another, let us only call to mind, that, by this principle of division, the Synod of Ulster was some time ago ' rent and divided into two parties, some of whom would not keep communion with one another ; and some that were their adherents, have,' from this cause among others, ' deserted both sorts of their Ministers.' These narrow dividing principles are the most successful devices that ever have been employed to defeat the design of Christianity, and to support the kingdom of darkness among men.

The Author of our faith directing his disciples how to distinguish between true and false Prophets, laid down this rule, *by their fruits ye shall know them*. But in the judgment of later ages, what a capital blunder was he guilty of, that never mentioned human creeds to decide this affair ! O the folly and presumption of men, that will be wiser than him, in whom dwelt all the treasures of wisdom ! In short, the history of 1700 years concurs with the nature of the thing, to prove beyond all doubt, that it never can be well with the Christian Church, until there be no other standard of just sentiment among Ministers or people but the word of God ; and one may venture to affirm, that men, with all their boasted wisdom, will never make a better test of truth,

Will you not allow, that it is a sin to add to the word of God in this as well as in any other particular, or to make the terms of our fellowship with one another more narrow than Christ left them by the inspired teachers of his Religion? ought not the Ministers of the Gospel now to receive the disciples of Jesus upon the same terms that the Apostles received Christians? doubtless they ought. But the Apostle Paul declares, Rom. x. 9. *If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart, that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved,* or admitted a member of his Church. Now, are the Clergy in any other age wiser than the Apostles? Is it their province to *mend* the Gospel? if a professed faith in Christ, accompanied with a virtuous life, gave any man a title to privileges in the Christian Church in the Apostolic age, why not still? Is the requiring a belief of any other thing a commandment of God or of man? If the former, where is it? If the latter, let us seriously reflect upon the awful declaration of Jesus to his disciples, Mat. xv. 9. *but in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*

Besides all this, is it not highly unreasonable, that the bulk of Christian people, little acquainted with the Confession, should be called upon to declare that they believe such a collection of dark and obscure, or perhaps frightful articles, but poorly supported from scripture? for instance, in the first sentence of this Confession, it is asserted, that 'tho' the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable, yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and of his will which is necessary unto salvation.' Now, many are so dull in understanding, that they cannot reconcile the two parts of this sentence to one another. They ask how men can be *inexcusable* in omitting any action, unless they have what is *sufficient* for performing it. 'Shall we, say they, injoin a piece of work upon our children or servants without allowing them tools or time *sufficient* for accomplishing it,' and yet reckon them *without excuse* when they leave it undone? they want also to know what right we have to damn such of the world as enjoy only the light of nature: or how we are qualified for such a high office: or what call we have to undertake this great task: whether the Apostle Paul does not disclaim this, 1 Cor. v. 12. *For what have I to do to judge them that are without?* and whether he does not assign a good reason for it in the 13th verse, *them that are without, God judgeth.*

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There are other things in this Confession still more hard to be understood, and in which it is of much greater importance for us to be rightly informed. Thus, Ch. 9. sec. 3. we are told, that ‘a natural man—is not able to convert himself, nor to prepare himself thereunto.’ And chap. 16. sec. 7. that works done by unregenerate men, ‘tho’—they may be things which God commands,—yet they are sinful and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God; and yet the neglect of them is more sinful and displeasing to God.’ Every one at all acquainted with these Authors knows, that by a *natural* and *unregenerate* man they mean the same character. How wretched then is this unregenerate man! and why should he pray to God for deliverance from this state? since he ‘cannot thereby convert himself nor prepare himself thereunto:’ nay, since this will be so far from making him meet to receive *favour* from God that it will be a *sin* according to this scheme. Must not the person who really believes this, be disposed, in the bitterness of his soul, to curse the Author of his existence, who has brought him into being in such deplorable circumstances that he cannot please God, but must sin, even by doing those things which God has commanded? how happy for us that such distracting notions are seldom attended to by any body! whence ariseth the necessity or expediency of calling upon any Christian to profess, that he believes these doctrines? have they any other tendency than to put people mad, or to make them desperate and quite unconcerned about their conduct? are they not contrary to the command of Jesus enforced by his promise to the multitude, *ask and ye shall receive?* and to the declaration of the Apostle Paul, that God *will freely give his holy spirit to them that ask it?* It were easy to show, that the texts of scripture brought to prove such opinions, are egregiously misapplied; but a particular explication of these would be inconsistent with the brevity here intended: let the mention of a text which these Gentlemen advance for another opinion in their writings, serve as a specimen of their manner of quoting the scriptures: this will show the force of religious prejudice, even in such great Divines, especially in an age when the Bible had not been studied with sufficient exactness after a Reformation from *some* of the corruptions of Popery. Nor is this bearing too hard upon them: for according to themselves, Ch. 1. sec. 9. the ‘only rule of interpretation of scripture is scripture itself; by which all the doctrines of men are to be tried, and in whose sen-
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‘ tence we are to rest’ in this spirit, let us try one of their doctrines in the shorter Catechism, that ‘ all mankind by the fall, to wit, of Adam and Eve—’ became liable to the pains of hell for ‘ ever.’ To support this, among other scriptures which any person may see to be equally impertinent, they produce Matth. xxv. 41. *Then shall he say also to them on the left hand, depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his Angels: With verse 46, these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.* Now, whoever will be at the pains of turning to this place in his Bible may perceive, without any labour or critical skill, that our Lord is not there speaking one word of what men may suffer for Adam’s offence; but expressly informing his disciples what the wicked shall in fact undergo for their own sins. For, says he in the person of his followers, *I was an hungry, and ye gave me no meat, &c.* here we are taught by the faithful and true witness, that the dreadful sentence passed against the cursed will be wholly owing to their own want of good affections; and not to a sin committed by any other person thousands of years before they were made. About the meaning of this text then Jesus of Nazareth and the Westminster Divines entertained different opinions. And which of them you will believe, judge ye. This is but one of many texts referred to in this Confession which have no sort of relation to what they are quoted for. Would people, that don’t desire to be deceived, examine it fairly, they would see, that the Authors of it were indeed fallible: an entire persuasion of which would be of no small advantage to many Christians. But this would require a temper truly teachable, and some degree of application.

Supposing then, a thing not impossible in itself, that an upright Christian, desirous to know the will of God, and to do it, should, after due enquiry, deny his assent to some opinions in this Confession; or see that the scriptures of truth are injuriously treated in being drawn in to prove very absurd tenets, by what rule of Christianity shall he be excluded from the enjoyment of Christian privileges? The Church of Rome professedly takes the Bible from the people; and to what purpose does the Church of Scotland leave it in their hands, if they must neither study it without fetters upon their minds, nor understand it in a sense different from the Clergy, under the high penalty of being shut out from Christian communion, and delivered over to Satan? In this matter there seems to be just as much difference between the conduct of

of the spiritual fathers in these two Churches, as there would be found between two natural parents, the one of whom would keep wholesome nourishing food from their children entirely ; while the other would put it into their hands, but correct them severely for making use of it.

It is also evident, that many in almost every Christian society, are so constantly employed in providing daily bread for their families, that they have little enough time left to spend upon a more useful book, that is, the Bible ; where they may find true religion quite free from those corrupt glosses and false interpretations that poison the mind, and blind the understanding to such a degree, that it cannot discern the plainest truths.

In these and the like cases, is it not intangling men with an intolerable yoke of bondage, to insist upon an assent to the numerous, abstruse, and perplexed articles of this Confession ? * Are not such Persons laid under an absolute necessity, either to act by an implicit faith, that is to become Papists, or to abandon their Christian profession, or at least to desert its most solemn positive institutions ? Why should the Clergy exercise such a spiritual tyranny over God's heritage, not only *without*, but in *direct opposition* to the divine law ? Is it not an Apostolic precept, *that no man put a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall, in his brother's way* ? Does not this conduct nearly resemble that of the Scribes and Pharisees, which our Saviour has branded with infamy, their binding *heavy burdens*, and *grievous to be borne*, and laying them upon other men's shoulders ? Has he not treated such practices with a pointed indignation no where to be found in his other discourses ? An awful warning to Christians to keep at the greatest distance from the appearance of such an evil.

Here it will be objected, that upon these principles we may receive the papists into our communion : for they will readily acknowledge, that they believe the Bible. But this objection is founded upon very confused apprehensions of the matter of fact. For tho' every papist of common sense will indeed own that he believes the Bible, yet no papist, who knows his principles and acts up to them, will at all grant, that he believes the Bible alone to be the rule of his faith or religious obedience. No ; all real papists of every denomination take only a part of their religion from the Bible ; and along with this, join the doctrines and decisions of their respective Synods and Assemblies. Whenever any man

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renounces

* Several instances of these unintelligible articles, may be seen in the pamphlet mentioned in a former note.

renounces these, and adheres to the Bible alone, from that moment he renounces Popery. And why should he not be received with open arms? shall it be said, that people take the Bible in different senses? what does this prove, but that they should enjoy their several opinions in peace? let me ask if the members of any Church are agreed about the meaning of their favourite System of articles. Far from it. Tho' uniformity in Sentiment is the foundation of all human establishments of religion, civil or ecclesiastic, yet every one finds by experience, that this is quite unattainable. Our situation will not admit of it. While men have different educations, capacities, books, company, &c. &c. they will necessarily differ in opinion. The utmost we should aim at is unity in affection. For all men can never be equally wise. And suppose some of the Church of Rome should daily count their beads as the necessary means of carrying them to heaven, why should we hate them or quarrel with them upon that account? What is the consequence when Christians bite and devour each other, but that they are naturally consumed one of another; and become the objects of just scorn to Deists and infidels? And what are the chief instruments of those unchristian divisions that have so miserably torn the Christian world, but the different Systems of Articles that proud mortals, lording it over God's heritage, are cramming down their brethren's throats, whether they can swallow them or not?

That unity among the disciples of Jesus is both practicable and extremely desirable is evident from the solemn, pathetic prayer of Christ to this purpose in the xvii. Ch. of John. But do not human schemes of faith, set up as rules, standards, or tests, in the nature of the thing keep the different parties of Christians at an irreconcilable distance from each other? while the Church of Rome is devoted to the Creeds composed by her old Orthodox Divines: and the Church of England no less warmly attached to the Articles of her wise Ancestors; and the Church of Scotland equally zealous for all the notions of her Confession-makers; while this continues to be the case, can a union among these Churches be so much as hoped for? without question it cannot. Whereas, without these *Engines of discord*, as there is but one Shepherd, so there might be but one sheep-fold. Then the distinguishing character which Jesus has given of his true disciples would naturally take place. Having no cause to *bate*, they would *love one another*. There would be nothing to *hurt or destroy in all God's holy*
mountain:

mountain : for the earth would be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Notwithstanding our different opinions in other things, we might all join in the most solemn offices of Religion, under the common Name of Christians, having *one God and Father of all, one Lord Jesus Christ, one faith in him, and one baptism, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost : with one hope or end of our calling, even the salvation of our souls : the only list of fundamentals which the Apostle Paul has given us when expressly speaking upon this subject, whatever additions wiser people have made since his time.* See Eph. iv. 1—6.

You complain that I don't bind parents to educate their children in the principles of this Confession. But why should this be complained of? what divine authority have the Ministers of the Gospel to engage Christians to any principles by a promise or oath? is it not the duty of every person to embrace the truth when and wherever he finds it? and to adhere to this alone? what security can any industrious upright man have that he will not change some of his opinions? it will be allowed at least in words, that the Authors of the Westminster-Confession, as well as of all other human Creeds, were fallible men : That they may have been mistaken. And what if we should find out some of their mistakes? In such a case, can a thousand former oaths bind us to believe what we see to be false? or to practice what we know to be wrong? None surely will imagine they can. There is no heresy I hope, in affirming, that we ought to believe and obey God rather than man. Such vows then amount to nothing. Accordingly, where do we find in the Bible a command for such a practice? or an example to favour it?

The grace of the Gospel in which we stand, is undoubtedly the Abrahamic Covenant enlarged to receive all nations, agreeable to the promise made to Abraham, Gen. xii. 3, *in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.* And God who knows our frame, with what is necessary to strengthen our faith, hope, and comfort in passing through a world of sense, has instituted certain sensible signs of this gracious dispensation in all the various forms under which it has appeared in the different circumstances of mankind. Circumcision was the first of this sort; which we find appointed for this express purpose, that it might be *a token of the Covenant*, Gen. xvii. 11. this was an outward sensible sign, that these children were born objects of the divine favour, within the limits of the peculiar Covenant of grace. But there is not the least

least intimation of any promise, oath or vow made by the parents or others at the observance of this religious rite.

Immediately before our Lord ascended to the right hand of the Father, he gave the Apostles a commission to extend this Covenant beyond the Jewish inclosure, fully accomplishing the promise made to Abraham; *go ye into all the world*, says he, Mark xvi. 15, *and preach the Gospel to every creature, and he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved*; signifying at least thus much, that men, upon acknowledging their belief of the message delivered, should be baptized, as a *token* or *sign* of their being already in a state of favour with God, and intitled to all the advantages conveyed by this grant of blessings. Neither is there here at the institution of Baptism, which appears to have succeeded circumcision, so much as a hint of any promise, oath or vow to be made by the believer. Our Lord generally enforces his precepts by turning men's attention to the happiness arising from the observance of them. Instead of swearing men to obey him, he commonly concluded his instructions with something to this purpose, *my yoke is easy, my burden is light*; Or, *if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them*. His Apostles addressed themselves to men in the same strain. We find them exhorting their hearers to become Christians without a word of *binding* them by any promise or vow, Acts ii. 38, *repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost*. Is it farther necessary to produce the instance of the Ethiopian Eunuch to the same purpose? *and the Eunuch said, see, here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized? and Philip said, if thou BELIEVEST with all thine heart, thou MAYEST. And he answered, and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God. * And he commanded the chariot to stand still, and they went both down into the water.—And he baptized him*. Now, if there be neither precept nor instance in sacred writ of binding men to any thing upon administering the *sign* of the Covenant of grace, is it not unreasonable and unscriptural in you to be greatly offended, because I don't call upon Christians to make any promise or vow upon this occasion? Should you not with great firmness refuse any human invention, if it was offered to you? upon this principle the first Reformers acted. Without this there never could have been a Reformation. Upon the same principle those illustrious

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* How short and clear was this creed, compared with a modern Confession of faith! How may we admire the superior wisdom of Philip's successors!

men, called Puritans, bravely rejected the spiritual tyranny of the Church of England, when thro' the ambition and covetousness of the leading Clergy working upon the mistaken policy of weak princes, this Church deserted the cause of Liberty and adopted maxims of an opposite nature. These Christian Heroes, the first Protestant-Dissenters, when oppressed by unjust power, sooner than destroy the ground and pillar of all reformation, sooner than relapse into the principles of popery, *went out from their livings like the faithful Abraham, not knowing whither they went.* If these venerable spirits were to visit this lower world, with what deep concern would they behold their degenerate posterity, still indeed wearing the same name, but generally gone aside from that glorious cause which they espoused at the peril of their lives, the cause of Religious Liberty; and endeavouring to introduce or support the very soul of popery, spiritual slavery! Are not such characters, in their distinguishing excellencies, worthy of imitation? If you or I should practise or submit to any particular of our own or other men's invention in religion, may we not justly expect, that our judge will ask, with a voice more solemn than the distant thunder's roar, *who hath required this at your hand?* will it be a sufficient answer, that this has been practised, perhaps enjoined, by a whole national Church, or more? How? has not the judge and Governor of all, plainly instructed us what to do in such circumstances? *Exod. xxiii. 2. Thou shalt not follow a MULTITUDE to do evil, neither shalt thou speak in a cause, to decline after MANY to wrest judgment.* Has he not clearly informed us, that in Religion the *commandments of men* are utterly vain and unacceptable to him? the reason is obvious: every thing of this kind is in effect raising our wisdom above his; which is highly impious.

Without any disrespect to the Assembly in Scotland, or the Synod in Ireland, it may be affirmed, that it is of no consequence whether they have made it a rule to *bind* Christians to any thing at the baptism of their children. The only question worth attending to is, whether there be such a rule in the Bible. The word of God, with every consistent Protestant, is the only and all-sufficient rule of faith and religious obedience. Will any number of men in Scotland, Ireland, or elsewhere, make such high pretensions as to be Lords of our consciences? what? to be Gods upon earth! if they did, words are wanting to express how sincerely they ought to be despised. Whenever any national Church departs

departs from the wisdom of the all-comprehending mind, and in the place thereof substitutes its own folly, is there any more regard due to it in such particulars, than to the Church of Rome? Has not the old Mother-Church an equal claim to infallibility, and an equal right to enact laws with any of her offspring? In a word, where are men invested with authority to make new laws in the Church of Christ? if this question can be answered in the affirmative, then farewell Liberty; welcome popery, with all the absurdity, superstition and trumpery of this monument of human vanity! But tho' this claim has been often made and exercised, yet a right to do so has never been shown by the most ingenious cheats that have undertaken to prove it: and it may be presumed, while the New Testament is in any esteem at all, or while men are acquainted with the frame of their own minds, and the unalienable rights of human nature, it never will. From all which it evidently follows, that unless there be divine authority for *binding* parents by promises of any sort at the Baptism of their children, nothing of this kind ought to be done. But such authority, it has been shown, there is not: and therefore the practice is unwarrantable.

There may perhaps be an objection urged against the omission of it to this purpose, that it leaves people too loose, and does not engage them to their duty. And this indeed is very plausible, because it may flow from a zeal for virtue; but it is superficial to the last degree. It is founded upon this supposition, that men are not sufficiently engaged to the practice of their duty, unless they do something that God has never required of them: But this no man surely will defend. He that made us reasonable creatures, and conferred upon us the blessings of the Gospel, has, by this frame and situation, laid us under the strongest obligations to the practice of righteousness that can possibly be conceived.— And if the motives and allurements drawn from the consideration of the divine favours, with the happiness annexed to virtue and the misery inseparable from vice, if these powerful arguments don't determine our minds to the obedience of the Gospel, nothing ever will. The commandments of men are worse than useless. They serve to ensnare and deceive us. By the observance of these, while we profess ourselves to be *wise* we become *fools*, like the heathen world of old. For, in the Words of the Westminster Divines, Ch. xvi. sec. 1. 'good works are only such as God has commanded in his holy word: and not such as without the war-
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rant therof, are devised by men, out of blind zeal, or upon any pretence of good intention?

Obj. He said, that man's nature was not corrupt till he was capable to commit evil actions himself : and that according to the use or abuse of those powers and faculties which God has given him, he was either pleased or displeased so as to make us happy or miserable.

R. That nature is frequently corrupted will be readily acknowledged. The only question then that can arise is, whether our Maker forms us corrupt ? or whether we corrupt ourselves ? and this may be easily resolved by any person that will duly attend to the nature of sin, or of God, or to the real feelings of his own mind.

If it be asserted, that we are made with a corrupt or sinful nature, pray, who is to blame for this ? must not he that makes us be chargeable with it ? sure none of us made ourselves. God is the Maker, not only of the first man, but of every individual that is born into the world. And can we think, that, after beginning to form a human creature, he will stop, and suffer some other principle to spoil the workmanship of his hands before we are finished ? this seems quite unworthy of so great and good a Being. That we are exposed to temptations from invisible powers, which cannot prove successful without our own consent, may be a wise appointment, tending, like all the other tryals of this imperfect state, to raise us to higher perfection. But that we should be spoiled or corrupted in the very making, without our own knowledge or consent, would be cruel and unjust ; and what can never happen to creatures under the forming hand of the most High. In short, as we come into existence, we are all the work of God, both in soul and body. And if any man will deliberately affirm, that the work of God is sinful, he discovers his notions of the supreme Being.

The source of our perplexity upon this subject seems to be a mistake concerning the real character both of Adam and his posterity. Divines in the dark reign of Anti-Christ, and the bulk of them since the Reformation, in order to support their darling schemes, have here led the people greatly astray. They have extolled Adam into a little God, with a design to sink his posterity into Devils from a comparison of their faults with his imaginary excellence. They represent Adam before the fall as having nothing but light in his understanding, nothing but harmony among his affections, with his will steadily bent upon obedience, and so forth,

forth, in the same romantic strain : while his offspring are painted in the blackest and most odious colours, ‘ as utterly indisposed, disabled and made opposite to all that is spiritually good, and wholly inclined to all evil, and that continually.’* Now, is it improper for us to enquire by what means these Gentlemen obtained the knowledge of what they so roundly assert ? so far as I can find, there is not in the whole Bible any comparison made between the virtues or vices of Adam and his descendants. Their real worth or deformity must then be estimated from their actions. For this purpose, as far as Adam is concerned, read the third Chapter of Genesis ; and how will you be surprized, when you find this same wondrous Adam, this Angelic Adam, this God-like Adam, to be nothing else in fact but a meer simpleton, an abject slave to his appetites, an easy dupe to importunity ! it is commonly asked, if any of us would have done better in his circumstances. To which it may be safely answered, that none of us could have possibly done worse. Why then should it be thought, that his natural abilities were at all superior to ours ? what ground is there for the fine speeches that Divines have made concerning this man ? ‘ he was created in the image of God.’ Very true : and so are all other men. By his being created in the divine image, none surely will understand that he was made equal to God ; but only that he bore some resemblance to the supreme Being. God is infinite in knowledge, for instance, and he had some degree of knowledge. God has the most perfect discernment between moral good and evil ; and he had some degree of this. God’s kingdom ruleth over all, and he had dominion over the creatures in this lower world. But in which of these particulars are other men destitute of the divine image ? Adam indeed was formed a man all at once in the full exercise of body and mind : whereas other men make their first appearance in the world *like the wild Asses Colt*, absolutely ignorant ; but discover by degrees that they are created in the image of God as well as Adam. We soon evidence, that God in our frame *has taught us more than the beasts of the field, and made us wiser than the fowls of the air*. In point of knowledge, it must be confessed, many among his posterity have far excelled any thing we read of in the history of the first man. Have we not also a sense of the difference between virtue and vice, moral good and evil ? when we see one person relieving the distressed, and another breaking in upon the field of the

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the widow or the fatherless, do we form the same judgment of their conduct? shall it be said, that we often act in opposition to this sense of right and wrong? so did Adam. Or will it be urged, that he was exposed to a strong temptation? so are we, being surrounded with many more temptations ever since, from a multitude of inhabitants occasioning a frequent opposition of interests, and from vicious examples, besides evil habits contracted perhaps in early youth. How alluring soever and swelling to the sight Divines may describe the forbidden fruit, yet certainly there is abundance of fruit in the world quite as *pleasant to the eyes*, in many circumstances forbidden, and in the use of which our virtue may be in great danger. Notwithstanding all our crimes then, we may be said, with as much truth as Adam and in as high a sense, to have that part of the image of God which consists in the love of virtue and abhorrence of vice. It is equally obvious, that his descendants are invested with a more unlimited dominion over the creatures than he possessed. For proof of this compare Gen. i. 28, 29, with Ch. ix. 1, 2, 3.

This detail of facts makes it evident that all men are created in the image of God. And the same is confirmed by express testimony of scripture in Noah's days, after Adam had sinned: Gen. ix. 6. *who-so sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.* The righteous ruler of the world is not here speaking of the punishment that should attend the murder of Adam; for Adam was dead long before this: but he is fixing the punishment that should be inflicted upon Murderers in that or any other age, to wit, death; for this express reason, that man in every period of time is made *in the image of God*. To the same purpose the Apostle James teacheth, that other men as well as Adam are made after the similitude, likeness or image of God, Ch. iii. 9, shewing the great inconsistency Christians are guilty of in using their tongues when they curse their brethren of mankind. *Therewith bless we God, even the father; and therewith curse we men which are made after the similitude of God.* He is not here reproving men for cursing Adam, but for treating their Neighbours with such rudeness, who were made after the similitude or image of God, whom yet they pretended to bless. All this, one would think, is clear and convincing. And can the scriptures of truth contradict themselves? No certainly; and of this we shall be entirely convinced, when we consider the texts alledged to prove that men, since Adam sinned, are not made after the similitude

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* Westminster Confession.

the widow or the fatherless, do we form the same judgment of their conduct? shall it be laid, that we often act in opposition to this sense of right and wrong? so did Adam. Or will it be urged, that he was exposed to a strong temptation? so are we, being surrounded with many more temptations ever since, from a multitude of inhabitants occasioning a frequent opposition of interests, and from vicious examples, besides evil habits contracted perhaps in early youth. How alluring soever and swelling to the sight Divines may describe the forbidden fruit, yet certainly there is abundance of fruit in the world quite as *pleasant to the eyes*, in many circumstances forbidden, and in the use of which our virtue may be in great danger. Notwithstanding all our crimes then, we may be said, with as much truth as Adam and in as high a sense, to have that part of the image of God which consists in the love of virtue and abhorrence of vice. It is equally obvious, that his descendants are invested with a more unlimited dominion over the creatures than he possessed. For proof of this compare Gen. i. 28, 29, with Ch. ix. 1, 2, 3.

This detail of facts makes it evident that all men are created in the image of God. And the same is confirmed by express testimony of scripture in Noah's days, after Adam had sinned: Gen. ix. 6. *who-so sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.* The righteous ruler of the world is not here speaking of the punishment that should attend the murder of Adam; for Adam was dead long before this: but he is fixing the punishment that should be inflicted upon Murderers in that or any other age, to wit, death; for this express reason, that man in every period of time is made *in the image of God*. To the same purpose the Apostle James teacheth, that other men as well as Adam are made after the similitude, likeness or image of God, Ch. iii. 9, shewing the great inconsistency Christians are guilty of in using their tongues when they curse their brethren of mankind, *Therewith bless we God, even the father; and therewith curse we men which are made after the similitude of God.* He is not here reproving men for cursing Adam, but for treating their Neighbours with such rudeness, who were made after the similitude or image of God, whom yet they pretended to bless. All this, one would think, is clear and convincing. And can the scriptures of truth contradict themselves? No certainly; and of this we shall be entirely convinced, when we consider the texts alledged to prove that men, since Adam sinned, are not made after the similitude

or image of God. For instance, Gen. chap. v. 3. it is said, Adam—*begat a son in his own likeness*; and this is explained as opposite to the image of God, in which Adam was made: but is this explication any thing else than meer invention and supposition? It may do well enough to confirm men in the belief of an opinion in which they are before instructed, and which they are fond of holding fast; for there is hardly any thing so weak but it may do this. But would any person that reads the Bible sincerely, in order to take his religion from it, or to correct his mistakes, form such a judgment of the text under consideration? especially when it is compared with the others that have been last mentioned? Nay, is it not asserted even in this same verse, that *Adam begat a son after his image*? But what was his image? was it not the image of God? certainly. His son then was after the same image. Besides, the word, *own*, is not the original at all, nor any thing for it; but is added by our translators, to give some appearance of truth to their preconceived opinions. And it is usual with divines speaking of this passage to add the word, *sinful*; and truly, by the time that in their great wisdom they have mended the Bible in this manner, they make it speak their own sense very clearly. But the sacred history only says, that *Adam begat a son in his likeness, after his image*: a son of the same nature with himself; having a soul and body, with senses and faculties of the same kind with his father; having that sort of understanding and conscience, of appetites, passions and affections, which were all the work of God, which were all in Adam when he came out of the hands of his Maker; without which he would not have been a man, but some other kind of creature.

Perhaps it may be objected, that allowing Adam to have begot a son of the same nature with himself, yet his own nature being at this time corrupted, that of his son must of course be corrupted too. But let it be carefully attended to, what I presume nobody will deny, that there can be no sin or moral corruption without the consent of the mind to vice, either in thought or in deed. And this consent, it is evident, can only be given by any mind for itself. This no one mind can do for another. If I lose my innocence, another may nevertheless preserve his. If I consent to any wicked action, this consent is not yours but mine.—Every one, who considers this matter, may perceive, that tho' a father, whose heart or life is greatly corrupted by wickedness, should have a son, the father's wickedness does not become the son's.

A father indeed who wastes his fortune or his body by excess, may leave his son less opulent or less healthful than otherwise he would have been. But this is so far from corrupting his mind, that it has a tendency to inspire him with horror against his father's vices, which are the occasion of so much distress to him.— The father's sin, in short, is the consent of his *own* mind, given to that which is ill. It is the abuse of his *own* passions. But the son's mind is not the father's. The father and the son are not the *same*, but *different* persons. A father may put out his own eyes, and yet have a son that sees nothing the worse of this. Far less can the *passions* of one that is unborn be abused. If ever this is done, the child must consent to it for himself. This will be better understood by mentioning some passion in particular: Anger for instance: this, in common with all our original passions, is an innocent and useful part of our constitution; but when it is not carefully governed and restrained, it either breaks forth in fury and revenge, or settles into hatred and malice: any of which is a great corruption of this natural passion. But a father under the influence of these vices, does not necessarily transmit them to his children. They have only the passion of anger by nature, which is the work of God, and quite necessary, tending to repel injury. But if they fall under proper tuition, and continue themselves to govern this passion aright, they will neither be outrageous nor malicious; if they are, they must consent to it themselves. It is owing to want of self-discipline, perhaps encreased by a bad education or ill examples, and not naturally derived from the violence of the father, which is only *his* abuse of the natural passion of anger. The same is evidently true of all our passions. The abuse of them only is criminal: and this any man can do for himself alone. Thus it is plain, that tho' Adam did corrupt himself, tho' he sinned by indulging one of his appetites against the law of God, yet this *abuse* of his appetite did not descend to his son, tho' the natural appetite itself did, as being at first a part of the nature of Adam, no wise inconsistent with his being created in the image of God.

But probably an objection still more plausible against our being made in the likeness of God will be drawn from the LI Psalm and 5th verse, where David in a solemn address to the Almighty declares concerning himself, *behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me*: a text that is not a little perplexing, especially as it stands in our translation. Its obvious meaning appears

appears to me, after mature consideration, to be impossible in the one case and unlikely in the other. The reasons of this belief I shall briefly lay before you, and do you judge for yourselves. It is no more your interest than mine to be deceived.

David in every other part of this Confession of sin, is deeply humbled under a sense of some heinous crime which he himself had committed: the only just cause of self-condemnation, one should think. But here he seems, in our English Bibles, to remove the charge from himself to some other person. *Behold*, says he in our translation, *I was shapen in iniquity*. But by whom was he shapen? David well knew this, and has clearly informed us, addressing himself to his Maker, Psal. cxix. 73, *thy hands have made me and fashioned me*. But would it be like a true penitent to tell his Maker in confessing his sins, that he had made and fashioned him in iniquity? would not this rather be a good excuse for his vices, that he had been made vicious? would it not be a barefaced insult offered to God his Maker? would it not be saying to the Almighty, 'As you have made me, so you have me'? certainly it was impossible for the pious, sensible David to address his God in such language. Accordingly, when we search the scriptures for the meaning of the Hebrew word here translated, *shapen*, we may find it in many places even of our translation rendered to *bear* or *bring forth*. Thus, Ilai. li. 2, *look unto—Sarah that BARE you*. And in the book of Proverbs Ch. viii. 24, *when there were no depths, I was BROUGHT FORTH*. Now, from the impiety of the address in our translation, my mind rests perfectly satisfied, that this is the meaning of the same word in David's confession; his acknowledgment is, *behold, I was born or brought forth in iniquity*. The next clause, *in sin did my mother conceive me*, as in our translation, does not appear very probable. It conveys such indecent ideas to the mind, that it is not likely a King would use such language, especially speaking of his mother. It is indeed of no consequence, with regard to the subject we are considering, what the sense of this may be.—Our translation of the *first* clause in this verse is truly home to the point. If it could be made out from parallel places of scripture or the reason of things, then farewell every thing that is desirable in heaven or earth! if it were true, that God has ever shapen any one man in iniquity, we could no longer depend upon the grand principle which is the joy of every good man's life, that we have a Maker and Governor who is *righteous in all his ways*,

ways, and HOLY in all his WORKS. But as to the *last* clause, we need not be much concerned about the meaning of it. For we come into being neither the better nor the worse, nor is our natural state at all affected by it, whatever sort of a woman David's mother was, whether she conceived him in sin or in virtue. It may therefore be enough just to observe, that it is probably a figurative expression denoting that David was soon chargeable with vice and folly. Be this as it will, the first clause, which alone has any concern with this subject, is, in literal English, *behold I was born in iniquity.* But how, it may be enquired, does this mend the matter? very much. It is a strong figure, setting sin in a clear, affecting light, extremely suitable to the genius of scripture-language and the design of this Psalm. An instance or two will illustrate this. The same Author observes Psal. lviii. 3, *that the wicked are estranged from the WOMB, they go astray as soon as they are BORN, telling lies.* David surely never meant to inform us here, that the wicked really make use of their tongues as soon as they are born, speaking lies. No; this would be a ridiculous assertion. But this language is very expressive of their great wickedness; that in their EARLY years they gave in to lying, and contracted strong habits of this sin. In the same figure, Job, speaking of his conduct towards the widow and the fatherless, says Ch. xxxi. 18, *from my YOUTH she was brought up with me, and I have guided her from my mother's WOMB,* that is, not strictly, but as soon as he was capable of guiding her. The confession of David is evidently in the same Style, a language highly figurative, but for that reason, particularly expressive of the passion he felt, and perfectly suited to his situation. David's prayer in this Psalm to be delivered from blood-guiltiness shews, that the whole relates to the affair of Uriah, in which we find a complication of the most abominable crimes. But it has been often remarked by the most careful observers of human life, that no man arrives at the greatest pitch of wickedness all at once. — And if this be just, we may safely conclude, that David had formerly made too free with the rules of virtue. At the same time, it must be allowed, that he naturally possessed a great stock of sensibility. This he frequently discovered when some ungoverned passion did not engross the whole man and steel his heart against the finer feelings of humanity. These were all awakened suddenly by the striking representation Nathan gave him of his conduct. He cannot bare the baseness of his actions. Oppressed
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with grief and shame he flies to God for relief in the beginning of this Psalm, *have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness; according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions.* In the 3d and 4th verses, he sinks in the divine presence under the deepest sorrow, *I acknowledge my transgressions: my sin is ever before me, &c.* But this is not all. This crime puts him in mind of former sins. In this thoughtful hour he reviews his past life, and with great justice considers his EARLY vices as leading him to the commission of this enormous one. In this light he laments and humbly confesseth them in the 5th verse; and this in language most expressive of the bitter remorse which filled his mind, *behold I was born in iniquity.* His sentiment may be expressed in these words stripped of the figure he used, 'this crime, O Lord, is not the only cause of my distress. No! I have EARLY neglected the discipline of my heart. I have long suffered disorder to prevail among my affections, and indulged myself in vicious courses to such a degree, that I am enslaved by the habits of sin, and hurried into the vilest actions by every temptation that is presented.' But how, it may be asked, can such a wicked state be reconciled to the declaration, 1 Sam. xiii. 14, that he was *a man after God's own heart*? whoever believes the history of the Old Testament must be sensible, that in many of David's actions this was not the case. And whoever looks into the connexion of the passage may observe, that this was only meant of one part of his conduct, viz. his care to obey the righteous Governor of the universe in his command to destroy the Wicked and Idolatrous Amalekites, who endeavoured for many ages to cut off the Jews, and to defeat the great designs of heaven with regard to this Nation, and to the whole earth by their means. This necessary *commandment of the Lord Saul had not kept.* And therefore compared with him in this particular, David was *after God's own heart*: or, as it is expressed Ch. xv. 28, he was *better* than Saul. The true meaning of this declaration being attended to, it neither reflects dishonour upon the sacred Oracles, as Deists would persuade us; nor is it inconsistent with the crimes of which David was guilty in other instances, and which he so penitently acknowledges in the li. Psalm, particularly in the 5th verse. What he bewails here is hinted at Psal. xxv. 7, but in simple language, and more coolly, because his mind was not so much affected. *Remember not the sins of my YOUTH, nor my transgressions*: but the sins of David's youth afford no proof,

proof, that he was not created in the image of God : far less do they prove that *we* are not made in this image.

Another text frequently brought to prove, that man's nature is not made in the divine image, but corrupt or sinful, since Adam's time, is Eccles. vii. 29, *God hath made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions.* But if it can be shown, that this, without any violence, proves just the contrary, the consideration of it may be useful. The English word *upright*, always signifies a character improved in virtue by the exercise of the capacities that are given. But this cannot be the meaning of it here, because capacities cannot be exercised before they are given. Accordingly, we often find the same Hebrew word rendered somewhat differently, and applied to other things as well as men. 1 Sam. vi. 12, it is translated, *straight*, and *right*, Ezr. viii. 21. This meaning it also bears sometimes when applied to human characters, Judges xiv. 3, Sampson speaking of Timnath, said unto his Father, get her for me to wife, *for she pleaseth me well*, or, as it is in the margin, and in literal English, she is *right* in my eyes. This, it appears from his general character, has no relation to her virtuous or religious endowments ; but only, that she was agreeable to his taste. The same translation would render the Hebrew more intelligible here, *God hath made man RIGHT* : that is, with such capacities as are fit in such a creature. But before man can be strictly called *upright*, or righteous, his faculties must be exerted into action, at least in thought. He must have time to act after he is made. Higher or lower capacities may be conferred upon different creatures : but it is the proper application of these, whatever they are, which alone constitutes virtue or righteousness. 1 Joh. iii. 7, *He that doth righteousness is righteous.* If it should be insisted upon, contrary to the nature of the thing, and the evidence of scripture, that the word here translated *upright* does signify *righteous*, it will prove quite too much for those who are fond of this. It will prove, that all men are made righteous. For if by *man* in the first clause, Solomon meant Adam only, it is strange that so wise a personage has given us no hint of such a meaning. He could not intend to deceive us : and yet he has neither mentioned Adam, nor the first man, nor any thing that can lead our thoughts to him. So far from it, that in the latter clause of this verse he informs us with as much clearness as words are capable of, that by *man* in the former, he understood not the first man alone, but all mankind in general. *God hath made man upright.* What follows ?

lows ? is it, but the first man corrupted the nature of his offspring by his *one* invention, or gave them a wrong bias before they were made ? no such thing : but quite the reverse. *THEY have sought out MANY inventions.* THEY, man in general, all men. The same form of expression you may find used by this Author, Ch. ix. 1. *No MAN knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before THEM.* And Job xxxii. 8. *There is a spirit in MAN, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth THEM understanding.* Surely then to confine the word *man* here to the first of the human race, more than to any other person, is something worse than meer imagination. It is contrary to the plain language of the inspired writer. In these words we have an important truth conveyed to us, worthy of our fixed attention, that notwithstanding all the wickedness abounding in the world, *God has made us all right*, suitable to his own wise and good design, exactly such as creatures of our rank ought to be made, and has placed us in circumstances adapted to the frame that is given us ; but that from our own inattention or voluntary abuse of the talents bestowed upon us, all our vices proceed : this text therefore proves, in a clear and satisfactory manner, that God our common Maker has given the very same kind of nature to the first man, and to all other men, whatever that nature is. Let us consider how far this agrees with experience. What infirmity or seeming imperfection, whether in body or mind, do we labour under, from which Adam was free ? do we dwell in houses of clay, whose foundations are in the dust ? and what was his body made of ?——does our blood run in our veins, thereby exposing our bodies to wastes of fundry kinds ? so did his.——Are we liable to pain from the impression of some external objects ? and is there any reason to believe this was not the case with Adam ? was his flesh without feeling ? if a branch had struck his eye while he was pruning the trees in Paradise, was he of so coarse a frame as not to be hurt by it ?——is it our lot, in subordination to the divine will, to be employed in frequent labour of body or mind ? and was Adam placed idle in Paradise ? no ; *God put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.*——Are we ready to neglect our proper employment, to saunter about indolently, or to do hurt ? so was Adam with a witness !——is our animal frame exposed to various disorders ? so without question was his. Bodily distempers are no where in the Bible represented as a consequence of the original sin, except an addition perhaps to one species of them.

them. And if we attend ever so little to the laws of the animal œconomy, the delicate structure of its vessels, with their mutual communication and nice dependance upon each other, and how meer a trifle will obstruct their operations, we shall conclude with undoubted certainty, that there can be no such thing in nature as a fabric of flesh and blood above a possibility of being disorder'd—Are we naturally subject to death? so doubtless was the first man. This was a certain consequence of his fleshly tabernacle. Besides, why was the tree of life provided, and this before he sinned, but to prevent the natural effects of his mortal frame? had he been naturally immortal, there would have been no occasion for this—Are we in danger of acting in opposition to the will of God? the event shows how much this was the case with our first parents.—Have we certain appetites or desires necessary for our preservation in this world, impelling us to the pursuit of their respective objects? and had not Adam the same? as he had a body with limbs like ours, had he not also a law in his members warring against the law in his mind, which did in fact lead him captive under the law of sin and death? did not the tree appear to our first parents, as it would to us, *good for food, and pleasant to the eyes*? did not a desire to gratify their taste, impell them to comply with this outward temptation? in short, what natural appetite, passion or affection have we, which these old ancestors of ours were not possessed of before they sinned? not one. All these, both in them and us, are necessary parts of human nature.

It is usual indeed with many to say, that all may feel in themselves what they call *original sin* or *corruption*. And if any will dare to call this in question, they are ready to look upon him as a proud wretch, forsaken of heaven, and unacquainted with himself. That this however, may not be misapprehended, it is not doubted but that many, through their own fault, may feel much corruption or wickedness in their hearts; and this in different degrees: which corruption probably loses nothing from the hope that they may fairly divide it between Adam and their Maker; for they never suspect themselves to be the authors of it. But what I was going to observe is, that many well disposed people complain of something, which, upon the evidence of their Catechism, they believe is derived from Adam's sin: but which, in truth, is nothing but the working of those appetites and passions that God gave both to Adam and his offspring for their own

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preservation and happiness. Men may no doubt use what words they please to express their thoughts. But when people say, that they feel original sin or corruption in themselves, and mean thereby, that they feel their several passions importuning their gratification, they may with great truth affirm in this sense, that Adam and Eve had original sin or corruption before they sinned at all. For it is manifest, we have no affection, passion or appetite belonging to our nature, but what is requisite in this state, and what they had too. Let us attend carefully to our own minds; let us leave out of the account all those desires that are of our own making, and then let us consider whether we are made *right* or *wrong*; whether we have any one desire given us in vain, or without a proper object provided for the gratification of it. What one affection of the heart could we want? destitute of any one of them, would we not be defective creatures, capable of less happiness than we may now enjoy, and unfit to answer the purposes of human life? the indulgence of them all, in the manner and within the limits which God has prescribed, is not only innocent but virtuous. The passions of *our* nature, as well as of Adam's, are all the work of God, and worthy of him, good in themselves, but may become hurtful by a wrong direction or want of discipline. They are good servants, but bad masters, like fire and water that in a certain measure are necessary to the comfort and happiness of human life, but, when they rise to a deluge or conflagration, lay all in waste and ruin. The abuse of our several desires, either by indulging them to excess, or placing them upon improper objects, is indeed attended with the most ruinous consequences. This was also the case with Adam and Eve. They placed the appetite or desire of food upon a wrong object when they eat the forbidden fruit. Other fruit they might have eaten in moderation without a crime. But this abuse of our lower powers is the work of our own hands. This is *striving* with our Maker, and running counter to his fatherly intentions. For the government of our passions he has given us a sense of right and wrong. This he has wrote upon the fleshly tables of our hearts, *as with a pen of iron and the point of a diamond*, never to be erased entirely by any degree of violence that may be offered to nature. The kind Author of our frame has also endued us with reason, another bright ray of the Divinity, enabling us to foresee the distant consequences of our actions, and to discern and apply the proper means for avoiding misery and obtaining happiness: be-
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sides many instincts perhaps, such as a sense of decency, modesty and the like, to restrain the fury and curb the violence of the most unruly passions. *Marvellous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty ! in wisdom hast thou made them all.* Man, the Lord of the lower creation, is indeed no exception from this general truth, all glory be to the father of our spirits and the former of our bodies, who hath made us *right* according to our rank among the works of his hands ; who hath formed us only a little lower than the Angels and crowned us with honour and dignity !

Our passions were never designed for any thing but service and subjection : and in this light we ought to bless our Maker for them. When they are governed without being destroyed, they all administer a certain degree of happiness ; and some of them a very high delight. Instead of complaining of our frame, therefore, with impious ingratitude, we should rejoice in it. We should with David praise the Lord, because we are fearfully and wonderfully made in soul and body.

To elude the force of these truths, it is a common thing with many to dwell with seeming pleasure upon the wickedness and general corruption of mankind ; and from thence to infer, that all men are formed with a corrupt or sinful nature. Now, the fact, that many are grossly wicked, is too evident. But is the above conclusion justly drawn from this fact ? because we see men guilty of the vilest crimes, can we from thence conclude that they come into being with a sinful nature ? no surely ; for we are well informed, that certain rational beings of a high rank, created Angels of light, yet sinned in great numbers. Adam and Eve, it is allowed on all hands, were made *right, in the image of God*, and yet they soon found out the invention of sinning, tho' they had no vicious examples before them, nor a sinful world to converse with. And therefore, if there were ten times as much sin among men as there really is, it would only prove that these wicked persons corrupt themselves, even as our first parents did. They were made fallible creatures ; and so are we. Adam sinned ; and he had no corrupt nature given him. We sin : and why, in the name of the God of truth, should we call in an imaginary corrupt nature to apologize for our own faults, or to account for our sins ? many of the Angels made Devils of themselves, tho' they were formed with very high capacities, and quite free from sin. And so may we, tho' made *in the image of God* in a lower sense, render ourselves the Angels of the Devil. If we would

would guard against the most distant approach towards so dreadful an event, let us beware of speaking dishonourably of our *Maker*, or trifling with our own souls. For whatever delusive dreams we may entertain, tho' wrapt up under the sacred mantle of religion, yet the God that made us *will not be mocked*. The time is coming when his *righteousness will break forth like the light, and his judgment like the noon-day*. Whatever reproaches unthinking mortals may now cast upon his conduct, or however we may abuse our own frame, it will then appear before Angels and men, that he has made us all **RIGHT**, just such as we ought to be made ; and that our corruption, or wickedness is wholly our own doing.

But you don't seem to think that we are accountable creatures. For, in the second part of your objection, you represent yourselves as offended at my having taught, that ' according to the use or abuse of those powers and faculties which God has given us he is either pleased or displeased so as to make us happy or miserable.'

Before you persist in condemning this, please to consider how dishonourable to God the denial of it is, how fatal to the interests of true religion and virtue among men. If you say, that God is not pleased or displeased with us according to the use we make of his gifts, does not this promise one final event to the righteous and the wicked ? according to the scriptures, *the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and cannot look upon iniquity without abhorrence*. And if you allow, that God is pleased or displeased with us according to our conduct, you must see, that our most intense misery or highest happiness arises from his being thus affected towards us. In his favour is life, but his displeasure is worse than death.

To be fully convinced of the truth and importance of what you here object against, besides the general tenor of scripture, you may consult the parable of the talents, Marth. xxv. 14, which contains the most striking representation of the divine wisdom and equity that ever was delivered to the sons of men. For the same purpose read Isai. Ch. iii. 10, 11, *say ye to the righteous, it shall be well with him ; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings.—Wo unto the wicked ; it shall be ill with him : for the reward of his hands shall be given him*. You may also find the language of our Lord paraphrased by the Westminster divines, Ch. 33, sec. 1, where what you look upon as an error is expressly asserted ; that ' all persons——shall——receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil.'

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But in opposition to all this, I have heard some of you urge, that you look upon it as excluding Jesus Christ. When it has been observed, that this is by no means the case ; that Jesus is the most remarkable gift of God to a sinful world, and that to receive him as he is offered in the gospel is such a worthy use of our rational powers as must be highly pleasing to God ; you have farther asked, ‘ how we are to receive Christ : ’ a very proper question when it proceeds from a real desire to be informed. The answer is obvious. It is by faith. But here you are ready to reply, ‘ faith is the gift of God.’ How then is it by the right use of our thinking powers that we are to receive Christ ? This deserves to be considered. The Apostle tells Christians, Eph. ii. 8. *by grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves : it is the gift of God.* Which may be paraphrased thus, ‘ by the divine favour ye are delivered from your former wretched state of ignorance and vice, and possessed of all the blessings of the gospel, through faith on your part receiving these blessings : and mark well, that ye may love him who first loved you, this happy change in your state from Heathenism to Christianity is not owing to works of righteousness which ye had done, but to the pure mercy and free grace of God.’ The design of the Apostle in this text is extremely evident from a careful reading of the chapter where it lies. And this being attended to, the manner in which these blessings are bestowed upon us will no longer appear doubtful or obscure. Faith, in common with every thing we enjoy or can hope for, is the gift of God ; not indeed in a secret, unaccountable way, without the activity of our own minds, as if we were machines or clock-work, but in a method suited to our reasonable nature. Our Maker has given us a power to discern the evidence of the truth. Adapted to this original gift, he bestowed Jesus Christ to the world with the clearest evidence of his being sent of God. The doctrines he taught are all consistent with the dictates of uncorrupted reason, agreeable to Moses and the Prophets, worthy of God to reveal, and highly conducive to the perfection and happiness of human nature. In his actions we find the strongest proofs of a divine commission. He healed all manner of diseases ; yea, he cast out devils, raised the dead to life, rebuked the stormy winds and raging seas, and they obey’d his awful mandate. Such works as these were infinitely beyond the ordinary powers of human nature, and declared to every attentive teachable mind, that they were performed by the power of
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of God. Hence the reasoning of the young man with the perverse Jews, seems to have been just and impartial, *bercin is a marvellous thing*, says he, *that ye know not from whence he is ; and yet he hath opened mine eyes. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.* And though Nicodemus loved the praise of men more than the praise of God, though he was ashamed publickly to profess himself a believer in Jesus, for fear of excommunication, yet his confession to our Lord in private was plainly the effect of a rational conviction, *Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God ; for what thou doest, no man can do these miracles except God were with him.* Now, as these works were a sufficient proof that almighty power supported his interest, so the accomplishment of those events he foretold assures us, that unerring wisdom concurred with his designs : and consequently, that all men should believe in him. Thus faith is the gift of God ; but conferred in the right exercise of our faculties upon the materials laid before us for our conviction. And therefore, this assertion, that God will in the end make us happy or miserable, according to the use or mis-improvement of our capacities, is so far from excluding Christ, that a due attention to it is the only certain method of reaping benefit from him. A right use of our minds will infallibly lead us to believe in Christ to the saving of the soul : while the true and only reason why all to whom he is revealed do not believe in him, is the neglect or abuse of the powers and faculties bestowed upon them. The defect is not in God, but in themselves. Let it never enter into our thoughts then, that a right use of our faculties derogates from the free grace of God. This will make us quite lazy, to which we are enough inclined without being so from principle. Our own industry in improving our understandings, and in the due direction of our desires follows the grace of God in the most natural order. The idle servant in the parable would neither have been called *wicked* nor *stothful*, unless the talent had been conferred upon him. Nor could the others have obtained the character of *good* and *faithful* servants, unless they had received the talents to work upon. The application is obvious. If there were nothing given us, there could be nothing required of us with justice. But to whom much is given, of such much shall be required. Let it then sink deep into our hearts, that receiving Christ as he is offered in the gospel, and living by faith in the son of God, is the best application of our reasoning powers, and highly acceptable to the father of our spi-

rits.——When certain of the Jews came to our Lord with this important question, *what shall we do that we might work the works of God?* he said unto them, *this is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.* You may perceive then that what you objected to is by no means inconsistent with the declaration of St. Peter, that to such as hear the gospel, *there is no deliverance from sin or the misery attending it, but by him; neither is there any other name given under heaven among men by which WE can be saved.**

Obj. In preaching upon these words in the 15th of the Corinthians, *"as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive,"* he never took an opportunity from that or any other text of scripture, to represent Adam and Christ as two federal heads, the one of all his posterity, the other of all his spiritual seed, nor did he make it appear from that or any other subject, that man suffered more by Adam's fall than temporary evils and a temporal death. Whereas it is a fundamental article of our Church, that Adam by his fall, intailed not only the miseries of this life, but death spiritual, death eternal as well as temporal on all his posterity.

R. The exceptions you make against the sermon here referred to, require few remarks: for, in your own account, they are only urged against what was *not* said in that discourse. You find no fault with what it contained. But I did not, it seems, make use of certain phrases which you thought necessary. With regard to this, it might be sufficient to observe, that while one professes to speak in the English tongue, it is most decent to mix no other language with it. Our translators, in rendering the doctrines of the Bible, have not used one of the expressions you mention. It will be readily admitted, that omission of duty in any station may be attended with the worst consequences, and is therefore extremely criminal. But the omission which you take notice of here, is not the omission of any thing scriptural, and of course cannot be blameable. This you must allow, unless you look upon your spiritual guides to be better judges of fit language to express

* The reason of this is evident. If men are enslaved by ungoverned passions or corrupt prejudices, to such a degree, that they are not delivered from their iniquities by all the light and grace of the gospel, it may well be expected, that every other method which can be taken, being less effectual in its own nature, will prove insufficient for their reformation. Hence it appears with what wisdom and strict propriety our Lord himself made that awful declaration, after giving a commission to preach the gospel to every creature, *he that believeth shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.* For this is the condemnation of such men, that light is come into the world, and they love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. That a vicious man should endeavour to persuade himself that the gospel is a cheat, is not to be wondered at. And if he succeeds in this, what can possibly enlighten his understanding, purify his heart, or reform his life? if men hear not Christ, neither would they be persuaded to repent, though one should rise from the dead.

press divine things than the spirit of God : which, I presume, you will not affirm. It is difficult to see what service these expressions can do to any good cause. They only perplex and bewilder the thoughts in our researches after truth. They are indeed a safe refuge for ignorance in those who would be thought very knowing ; for which reason they are most commonly used by men of this character. Hard words make people stare ; and they who hide themselves behind them, may be regarded by the undiscerning as wonderful scholars, perhaps admired as profound Divines, while in the mean time they neither know what nor whereof they affirm. But certainly we would understand ourselves and one another better ; and what is still of greater advantage, we would quarrel less about religion, and know more of it ; we would think more justly, and communicate our thoughts more clearly, if we could be persuaded to speak in the great variety of plain words which our own language affords, instead of the unintelligible jargon invented by the popish school-men in the most barbarous ages, when *darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the nations*. In this gloomy period, these triflers, by their *vain philosophy and science falsely so called*, laid the foundation of all that wrangling about religion, which has since infested the Christian world ; and which indeed has left the shadow, but destroyed the substance of Christianity. For, however we may sometimes open the Bible by way of vain compliment, or to keep our folly the better in countenance, it is yet manifest, that our religious differences are not occasioned by the use of this book, but by laying it aside in fact, and turning to *men speaking lies*, or perhaps saying nothing in great swelling sounds. No doubt, it is through want of judgment in succeeding generations, that such stuff is not rejected with scorn. The inventors of it had no other meaning than to conceal their ignorance, or express their vanity, and make themselves be taken for something while they were nothing. And were it not for the same or worse reasons, it may be presumed, they would have few followers. But to return from this necessary digression, if it be one :

In the sermon you object against, you might have observed it asserted in plain English, that if the threatening, *in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die*, had been inflicted upon Adam, he must have been deprived of that life which God had given him, of soul and body, and that for ever ; and his posterity must have been entirely lost with himself. This, if you please, sooner than

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we should differ about words, may be called death spiritual and eternal as well as temporal, consisting in the dissolution of all the powers of soul and body without recovery. From this lost state, in the language of strict law, it was also observed, that he or his posterity could only be restored by the grace of the law-giver, that was first obscurely intimated, and afterwards fully declared by Jesus Christ. This still appears to me a plain, scriptural account of the matter.

As to my having never represented Adam as the fæderal head of all or any of his posterity, I thank you for your testimony that I never taught such an error. This is often expressed more plainly in these words, that 'God made a covenant with Adam, not only for himself, but for his posterity.' But where are we told in the Bible, that God made a covenant with Adam, even for himself? the only evidence I have seen for this is Gen. ii. 17, *but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.* But where is the covenant here? is there any thing in these words but a command first, *of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it?* and then a threatening of the penalty that should attend the breach of this command, *in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die?* is there any more in this verse? is there any promise made to Adam of life or any other blessing in case of obedience? every one may see there is not. Adam, I doubt not, would have enjoyed life immortal without passing through the gate of death, had he obeyed the voice of God. But this he could only have expected or received from the divine *goodness*: because God brought himself under no obligations that we hear of to this purpose, made no covenant, promise or bargain with him of this kind. The reward therefore he could not have challenged as a *debt*: it must have been of *grace*. Let this plain truth be well considered, because it overthrows the huge fabric of absurdity, that has been erected with great labour upon the sandy foundation we have been examining. And this it does the more effectually, that it is suited to the meanest capacities, if attentive.

This being evident, that God brought himself under no obligations to confer eternal life upon Adam alone, tho' he had abstained from the tree of knowledge, what becomes of the wild notion, that he obliged himself to give this to his descendants? is it not astonishing how such groundless fancies entered into the minds of men? and far more so, that they should be recommend-

ed under the high character of being revealed from heaven, while the Bible is in the hands of every body ? where do the sacred scriptures speak any thing like this ? Divines alledge 1 Cor. xv. 22, *in Adam all die*. Or as the same sentiment is expressed, Rom. v. 18, *by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation*. But is this the language of a covenant or bargain ? Adam was condemned to die too, Gen. iii. 19, *dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return*, and yet, unless we professedly add to the word of God, it is beyond doubt there was no covenant made with him for himself. These texts in St. Paul's writings fairly prove this much, that all men are condemned to die in consequence of the first offence. The fact seems to be this. The first man, on account of his sin was excluded from the benefit of the tree of life ; which from the goodness of God 'tis probable he would otherwise have enjoyed : and then he naturally wore down. His house of clay decayed 'till at last it fell. This tree, whether an emblem of immortality or the natural means of obtaining it, God, to express his abhorrence of sin, removed on account of the first transgression, and has never thought fit to restore it. In this there is no wrong done us. We can have no claim upon God for this or any other gift. And he is the only competent judge, whether it was proper to allow us the use of it or not. As he has not done it, our bodies originally mortal return to their native dust. Thus in the natural course of things *it is appointed for all men once to die*. But has this fact the air of a covenant made with any body or for any body ? into what perplexing mazes do the wisest men plunge themselves, when they depart from the plain, simple truth ! of the whole system of corrupt religion hammered out by the Monks and Friars, with Austin the Popish Saint at the head of them, it is the most shocking principle but *one*, that thousands should be robbed of such a precious jewel as their innocence without their own knowledge or consent ; that millions unborn should be involved in guilt by the rashness of another man ; and of a man too, whose actions don't discover that he had any more power than ourselves, or made a better use of it than the worst of us ! to support this amazing scheme all the arts of deceiving are called in ; and as the most successful, *hard words and false suppositions*, to benumb our understandings, to hinder us from perceiving the difference between right and wrong. But if we dared to make use of the common sense which our Maker has given us, we would clearly see, that this notion is in the nature of the thing

thing impossible as well as unscriptural. That one person should suffer by the ill conduct of another is extremely common. But this does not prove that one man is guilty of the crime of another. Let us for a moment follow the example of orthodox divines ; let us put supposition in place of revelation ; let us suppose what is nowhere revealed, that Adam represented the rest of mankind : does it follow from thence that they are guilty of his sin ? How ? when the representative of any society betrays the interest of his constituents, they may suffer, perhaps severely ; but in the judgment of all men is not he alone the guilty wretch ? doubtless he is. That one man should act for others in such a manner that by his sin they are sinners, is an opinion which never would have entered into the thoughts of any but divines : too many of whom seem to have claimed a privilege of saying any thing, without ever considering whether it be possible or impossible. Otherwise they could not affirm, that men in succeeding ages are guilty of the first man's sin ; which is so manifestly absurd, that it is difficult to expose it more clearly by any reasoning than by the very mention of it. But since many, with the principles of reason in their heads, with the feelings of justice and humanity in their hearts and the Bible in their hands, do yet espouse this as a divine doctrine, it may not be unprofitable to view it in every light, that its vileness may appear to all.

The very nature of sin demonstrates the impossibility of our becoming guilty by the sin of Adam. An Apostle tells us, that *sin is the transgression of the law*. But we could not *sin* or *transgress a law* before we were made. If we can be sure of any thing, we may rest in this. We could not sin in Adam ; we could neither stand nor fall with him, for this plain reason, that we were not there at all. And if there be a self-evident truth in nature, it is, that any being cannot act where it is not.

Divines indeed pretend to know, that tho' we are not personally, that is really or truly, guilty of this sin, yet God imputes it to us, charges it to our account. What ! let us pause a little upon this wonderful assertion. Does not God know, whether we were in Paradise when he gave the command to Adam ? And whether he enjoined the same law upon us ? and whether we violated this same law ? certainly ; he well knows that we had neither *art* nor *part* in this matter. And will he, who cannot lie, say we are guilty of that which he knows we were not guilty of ? is the God of heaven an unrighteous judge ? he that believes this may believe any thing. That

That any sin is imputed to those who never were guilty of it, is an imagination, not only without any ground in the sacred oracles, but contrary to the clearest language that can be used.—The Apostle Paul lays it down as a general truth, that *sin is not imputed when there is no law*. But the law forbidding the use of a certain tree in Paradise was no law to us : for we were not then in being. From whence we may safely conclude, that the transgression of this law, or the original sin, is not imputed to us.

Besides, the Almighty in all his transactions with men never speaks one word of charging them with this sin, but quite the reverse. This crime might have been imputed to Cain, the immediate son of Adam, with as much justice as to the more distant branches of his family. He, we are informed, fell under the divine displeasure. Upon which he was *wroth and his countenance fell*. And the Lord said unto Cain Gen. iv. 6, *why art thou wroth, and why is thy countenance fallen ?* Here the great God in his fatherly goodness condescends to expostulate the matter with him in order to convince him of his mistake. Cain is silent. But the Almighty assigns the reason of his having had respect to Abel and his offering, and not to Cain ; that it was no causeless partiality, which Cain seems to have apprehended ; far less was it owing to the sin of his father. He mentions no such thing, but ascribes the different reception of the two brothers to the different dispositions of mind that accompanied their oblations : and, like a righteous being, brings the matter expressly home to himself. *If THOU doest well, shalt thou not be accepted ? and if THOU doest not well, sin lyeth at thy door*.

Not only here, but through the whole Bible, all mankind are represented as in a state of discipline, the subjects of God's laws, like Adam, every one accountable for himself, and for no other. It is an injunction of the law of Moses, Deut. xxiv. 16. repeated upon many other occasions, and observed by all the good Kings of Israel, that *the fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers ; every man shall be put to death for his own sin*. Can we imagine, that the King of kings will in his own conduct violate this equitable maxim, the observance of which he has recommended to others ? let us hear himself in this matter through the whole eighteenth chapter of Ezekiel ; and particularly in the 20th verse, where he declares in language that cannot be misunderstood, *the soul that sinneth, it shall die : the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father,*

ther, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son ; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. Agreeable to this, the Judge of all the earth hath informed us, that when he shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels, then *he shall reward every man according to his works* ; not according to another person's, whether good or bad, but according to his own. Now, if the holy scriptures are the rule of our faith, if we do not avowedly throw them aside, and in their place substitute the dreams of men, these declarations will teach us, that every individual can incur the displeasure of God by nothing else but his own wickedness : that the innocence or guilt, the final happiness or misery of every creature is the inseparable consequence, not of another person's actions, but of their own conduct.

Give me leave to remind you of another text or two to the same purpose from St. Paul's writings, to shew, that no doubtful or figurative expression in this author should be *strained* to such a sense as to contradict what is plain and incontestible. Of this kind without question is his assertion, Rom. xiv. 12, *EVERY ONE OF US shall give account of himself to God.* And Gal. vi. 5, *EVERY man shall bear his OWN burden.* No Christian will affirm that the Apostle entertained contradictory principles. And if he did not, if it be true, that every man shall bear his own burden ; if there be nothing inconsistent with this in the word of God, where shall we go for the doctrine of a *Fæderal head*, or representative whose sin is charged upon us ? is it to the testimony of God ? no ; for this never contradicts itself. Accordingly, many wise men find themselves under a necessity of supporting their principles, not from the Bible, but from the dregs of Popish divinity conveyed from one generation to another in the writings of men. They seem to entertain a secret dread amounting almost to a consciousness, that their opinions are not clearly and certainly contained in the holy scriptures. They are justly apprehensive, that by allowing their favourite authors to be fallible men, they must part with some of their darling notions : which, though ugly and deformed in themselves, people may grow fond of, from long acquaintance, as well as from not having a fairer form, the beauty of true religion, displayed before the eyes of the mind. There is one way, and but one, to be delivered from such delusions ; and that is, to comply with the Apostles advice, *to prove all things, and hold fast that which is good* : a rule worthy of the Father of light and truth.

Obj.

Obj. In examining one of his people he put the following question to him, what are you or I the worse of Adam's fall? to which the man made little or no answer, but Mr. Nelson himself replied, that we were nothing the worse.

R. It afterwards appeared by your own testimony that I allowed the *effects* of this sin. But after what hath been already said relative to Adam's sin, the inquisitive will perhaps ask, what these effects are? For the solution of this question, however, you are not to have recourse to men, but to the word of God. It is a matter of meer revelation. Search the scriptures then for the effects of the first sin. And if you would hope for success in this search, you must give no place to *imagination* or *invention*; but attend soberly to what is really spoken concerning Adam, or his sin, or the effects of *this* sin. But why, you'll say, such an impertinent advice? to tell you the truth, it is occasioned by the conduct of Divines, who are followed too implicitly by many of the laity in bringing passages of scripture to shew the effects of Adam's transgression, which yet, every one may see, don't speak a syllable of Adam or his sin. A few instances will explain this.

The Apostle Paul writing to the Christian converts at Ephesus, mentions it Ch. ii. 1, as an undoubted proof of the divine love, that tho' they had been formerly *dead in trespasses and sins*, yet God had *quickened* them. Now, to be *dead in sin* is language expressive of the most deplorable corruption. The body is dead when its several parts give over performing their proper offices, when the heart ceases to beat, &c. in allusion to this, the mind is called *dead* by a just figure, when its powers are perverted from their natural offices; when the understanding is not employed in contemplating truth, nor the affections placed upon suitable objects; when men do not love what is lovely, nor hate what is hateful. This was the miserable condition of these Ephesians as well as of others before the publication of the Gospel. Instead of exercising their minds in the knowledge, love and service of God, they were sunk in the grossest Idolatry and wickedness; of which we have a shocking account in the first of the Epistle to the Romans.

In the second verse of this chap. he tells these converts from Heathenism, that they had *walked according to the course of this world*; and in the third verse he ranks himself with them, as being the Apostle of the Gentiles, and originally one of the Jews; who, at the appearance of Jesus Christ, were little superior to their

Heathen

Heathen neighbours either in knowledge or virtue. *Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past, &c. and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.* In a former verse they are called the *children of disobedience*. And the one is mentioned as a consequence of the other. This state in which they were by nature, appears plainly from the whole passage to relate to their wicked conduct under the light of nature, before the Gospel was made known to them. This therefore was a character peculiar to the wicked Heathens, and could not belong to the virtuous part even of them. For the same Apostle tells us, Rom. ii. 14, that some of the *Gentiles—do by nature the things contained in the law*. Far less can this place in the epistle to the Eph. be applied to Christians in any sense. For if they are the *children of disobedience*, it is under the grace of the gospel, which will render them the *children of wrath* in a much higher degree than if they enjoyed the light of nature alone. But whatever is the sense of this passage, yet every reader may see, that in the whole Epistle there is no mention of Adam or of his sin, or the effects of it : but of the sins of these Gentiles *in times past*. And if men will give such loose reins to their imaginations, as to apply this to something derived from Adam, what may they not bring the Bible to prove ? or of what use can this incomparable book be to Christians, if it is treated in this manner ? some are ready to ask how the Heathens fell into such great crimes as they are here charged with, unless we ascribe this to Adam's conduct ? it may be answered in general, that their sins and Adam's proceeded from the very same cause. Both he and they abused the capacities that were given them. Nor does it appear from their conduct, that the nature of the one was better or worse than that of the other.* Be this as it will, let it be observed, that in all these expressions

* The doctrine of some corruption, or wickedness and weakness brought upon the human race by the sin of Adam, seems to have been invented in order to account for the moral evil that we daily see in the world ; and this is the use still made of this doctrine by the advocates for it. The Westminster Divines tell us, that from thence proceed all our actual transgressions. But is it not strange that we rest satisfied with this ? for this shifting from one to another is just as rational as the manner in which the Indian Philosophers accounted for the support of the world. Unacquainted with the true cause, but unwilling to acknowledge their ignorance, they told their disciples, that the world was supported by an Elephant, the Elephant by a Tortoise, and the Tortoise upon---nothing. Was not this ridiculous ? but why do we laugh at them, while we imitate them in a subject of a far greater importance ? ask many Christian Divines how it happens that there is so much sin in the world, and they will tell you a tale about Adam. Is not this finding out a Tortoise to rest the Elephant upon ? certainly. This will appear, if you push the matter one step farther and ask them how it happened that Adam sinned ? here our modern Philosophers with all their divinity are at a stand. They can give no account of Adam's sin but what will equally account for ours independent of his, namely, that our Maker formed him and us changeable creatures, and placed him and us in a state of trial for our improvement.

expressions, there is not a word spoken of Adam, nor any effect of his sin, tho' brought for this purpose by very eminent Divines. Another text often quoted with the same design, is Job, chap. xiv. 4, *who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.*—Whoever looks into the connexion of this with what goes before, will probably conclude this to be the meaning of it, 'that children are of a frame naturally the same with their parents, liable to sickness and mortality.' But whatever it means, let it only be attended to, whether Adam, or his sin is named here, or any effect of this sin taken notice of.

Out of a great number let us turn to one more, of which the same use is made, Gen. vi. 5, where the Historian assigns the reason why God brought a flood upon the world, *he saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*: A very good reason for destroying such a vile generation. But is this gross wickedness here said to be an effect of Adam's sin? so far from it, that, in direct opposition to this, their general corruption is justly ascribed to the sinners themselves. In the 12th verse it is affirmed, that *ALL FLESH had corrupted HIS way upon the earth*. And if we should admit our translation of what David says of himself in the LI. Psal. it would indeed prove, that he was made with a corrupt nature; *shapen in iniquity*. But how would it prove this corrupt nature to be an effect of Adam's sin? is Adam mentioned in the whole Psalm? is there a word about his sin in any part of it? the most careless reader may see there is not.—Why then should we ascribe David's being *shapen in iniquity* to Adam's sin, more than to any other man's? if nothing will serve us, but to *feign, invent and imagine*, without any foundation, mayn't we *feign* one man as well as another? mayn't we *suppose* or *imagine*, that David's sinful nature was owing to your sin, or to my sin, or to any other person's sin as well as to Adam's? why should we charge his being *shapen in iniquity* upon Adam's eating, more than upon Noah's drinking? David is equally

in virtue and happiness, having endowed him and us with all the principles necessary for this purpose, some of them to govern and others to be governed. Such a frame exposes every rational creature to a possibility of sinning. The origin of moral evil is exactly the same in Adam and in other men; and that is the want of due care and diligence to direct and govern our appetites and passions. Here it was that Adam failed; and here it is that his descendants fail. Adam, however, in the Indian manner of making a *remove*, answers a great many questions. But unluckily, after all that can be invented about him, matters grow still worse. For according to the scheme that he had capacities vastly superior to ours, it is unspeakably more difficult to account for his sin than for those of other men without having recourse to him. We are allowed on all hands to be fallible creatures, in great danger of committing vice and folly.

equally silent about both : and what bounds can be set to fiction ?

Mr. Addison tells us, he read a sermon of a conventual in the Church of Rome, on these words of the wise man, *I said of laughter, it is mad ; and of mirth, what does it ?* upon which the preacher laid it down as a point of doctrine, that ' laughter was the effect of original sin, and that Adam could not laugh before the fall !' one would suspect, that our Protestant Divines had been bred at the feet of this Popish conventual, they excel so much in the art of *invention*, and are so dextrous in finding the effects of the original sin in places that neither name Adam nor his offence. The passages that have been mentioned, may serve as a specimen of their ingenuity in quoting scripture to prove the effects of Adam's sin !

But are these effects no where describ'd ? doubtless they are in a few places ; nor is it fatiguing to consult these. For the consequences of Adam's fall are but once spoken of, so far as I know, in the Old Testament, Gen. iii. 7—19. here the effects of the original sin upon Adam, Eve, the serpent and the ground are clearly pointed out. Let it be well considered, whether there is any curse pronounced here upon our first parents or upon their posterity.

Except in this place, any that reads the Bible may observe, Moses does not name Adam's sin, or the effects of it. The prophets are all equally silent upon the subject : from whence it would appear, that to speak of it was no part of their commission.

When a greater than any of these prophets appeared ; when he who was the light of the world, who spoke as never man did, who has assured us that by his words we shall be judged in the last day ; when this important personage visited our world, does he ever mention Adam ? or his sin ? or the effects of this sin ? not so much as once. Shall it be said, it was improper he should speak of it before his death ? let us not wait to dispute this, tho' no good reason can be assigned for it, if the matter was really of that importance which is generally imagined. But what do we hear concerning it in the discourses of the Apostles to Jews and Gentiles after the giving of the Holy Ghost ? not one word in the whole history of their Acts. No ; instead of amusing their hearers with talking of the sin of another man, they exhort them to repent of their own former sins, to receive the Gospel, and walk worthy of it. Neither does one of the Apostles take notice of this sin, or the effects of it, in the letters we have that were addressed to Christian Churches ; except St. Paul, who introduces it two or three

times, by the bye, not as the chief thing intended, but for the illustration of some other point. Thus, 1 Tim. ii. 12, the Apostle teaches, that *the woman ought not to usurp authority over the man*. This seems to be a dictate of nature itself, independent of any sin. Accordingly, the Apostle gives one natural reason for it in the 13th verse, that *Adam was first formed, then Eve*.— And in the next he enforces a regard to his advice in this matter, from an instance in the Jewish history, showing how fatal female influence may be. *Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression*. The only effect of the first sin, here spoken of, is agreeable to what is said to Eve, Gen. iii. 17, *thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee* : which no doubt would have been the case without this sin. We are told, that the woman was made a *help-meet* for the man. But unless *her desire had been to her husband*, she would have been a very ungracious help. The instance, however, of Eve's leading Adam astray was properly enough adduced for his purpose.

Another place where this Apostle mentions an effect of Adam's sin, in the same passing manner, is 1 Cor. xv. 21, 22. In this whole chapter he is proving the resurrection of the dead by sundry arguments. Among others he speaks of God's dispensations towards the world, with regard to death and life. *For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead*. And lest there should be any thing obscure in this language, he expresseth the same sentiment still more clearly in the next verse, *for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive*. The one is manifestly designed to explain the other. In the 22d, he observes, that by *man* in the first clause of the former verse he meant *Adam* ; and in the second, *Christ*. And therefore the phrases, *death came* and *die*, agree with each other ; and *the resurrection of the dead* and being *made alive*, are exactly the same. It is obvious then, that when the Apostle says, *In Adam all die*, he means that *death came* into the world by his conduct : or in other words, that upon his sinning the tree of life was removed. This effect of the original sin is also mentioned, Gen. iii. 19, *dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return*. It is likewise evident, that since *death* is here set in opposition to *the resurrection of the dead*, it must signify that death, whatever it be, from which all men shall be restored.

The only place besides these where any effect of the first sin is spoken of, is Rom. v. 12—19. and here too the subject is brought

brought in to prove another point, the extent of the divine grace to all nations: whereas the Jews were for making a monopoly of the favour of God, for keeping it all to themselves. This fatal mistake of theirs, St. Paul combats by different reasons in the former chapters; and here, from the common descent of all, and their suffering equally by the sin of one man, he draws an argument to shew the reasonableness of their reaping benefit from the righteousness of another. Besides this main point, the passage contains several particulars, as that the grace of God declared by Jesus Christ abounds far beyond recovering all men from the effect of Adam's sin which is here mentioned, &c.

In order to understand what is here taught concerning the first offence, let us attend to the various expressions used to denote this, according to the different lights in which our Author views it.

In the 12th verse, he tells us, that *death entered into the world by the sin of one man*: which is evidently the same effect of this transgression with that mentioned in the Epistle to the Corinthians.

In the 15th, showing the effects of the first sin, and the extent of the divine grace in Christ, he uses almost the same words, *thro' the offence of one many be dead*. Here it is plain, there is nothing more affirmed, as to this particular, than in the 12th verse.

In the 16th, explaining his subject farther, he varies his expression, in common with every good writer, when there is occasion to set the same thing in different lights. *The judgment was by one to condemnation*: and in the 17th, that *by one man's offence death reigned*. In all these places he is evidently speaking of the same effect of this sin.

In the 18th, having before explained and proved what he had asserted in the 12th, he, in different words, lays down the same thought again, in order to draw his grand conclusion from it.—*Therefore as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation*.—It appears from the former expressions signifying the same thing he is here speaking of, such as *death entered, many be dead, death reigned, &c.* that by this offence all men were condemned to suffer death. So far the judgment or sentence extended in fact, when upon this offence the tree of life was taken away. He expresseth the same thing more clearly, when he says, *In Adam all die, or by one man death came*. Let this be carefully considered, because it explains the 19th verse of this chap. where the phrase is the most distant from our manner of speaking in modern languages. It is there affirmed, that *by one man's disobedience*

dience many were made sinners. Nothing has contributed more to lead people astray, than a phraseology so different from our own. But however they who are unacquainted with the original languages, cannot account for such a manner of expression; yet whoever reads the 18th and the 19th verses together, may see that the one is only a different way of expressing what is contained in the other; that by the offence of one, the rest of mankind were condemned to suffer what the Apostle had been speaking of, that is death. The benefit of the tree of life is no more administered to them than if they had been *sinners* in this particular; which yet he all along considers as the offence of *one* only, and not of the *many*.

It may be said, that the language of the Apostle is very strong; and that we ought to submit our understandings to divine Revelation; a way of speaking that is extremely vague, tho' common, and misleads some without their attending to it. The Apostles language is evidently strong and figurative. Neither will any professed Christian once doubt, whether we are to submit to divine revelation. This is granted by all. But the question is about the meaning of this part of Revelation. So far as men understand a divine Revelation right, it is a just rule to them. But if they pervert it, they are misguided the more effectually, that they clothe their own fancies with the high character of divine inspiration, and act as if this were the case. If the light that is in men be darkness, how great is that darkness! they imagine themselves 'warmly engaged in the service of Christ, while they are fighting the battles of the Devil.'

There is a passage in the history of our Lord that may be of special benefit to men in such circumstances. The Saducees were a set that endeavoured to puzzle him with questions artful enough upon their own scheme. Upon one occasion of this sort he found it necessary to break through their artificial cobwebs by telling them plainly, that they *erred not knowing the scriptures, neither the power of God*. Their first principles were wrong; and however justly they might reason from these, they only went the farther astray. Besides the most obvious instruction contained in this answer, it gives a hint that may furnish us with the best rule we can have for a just interpretation of mysterious passages in the Bible. With their *not knowing the scriptures*, he mentions their ignorance of *the power of God*: which was the particular perfection of the Deity that would have thrown light upon the subject

subject they were speaking of. Now, this may lead us to consider an attention to the divine perfections as absolutely necessary to the true knowledge of the scriptures; and to pay a particular regard to whatever perfection is most immediately concerned with the subject that employs our thoughts. Let us apply this to interpret Rom. v. 19; which is the only place in the Bible that really speaks any thing like what has been taught concerning the original sin. *By the disobedience of one many were made sinners.*—Divines boast of this as a clear proof, that other men are charged with Adam's sin. Well, supposing this, by what being are they charged with this sin? it will be answered, that God charges them with it. Be it so. What sort of a being is this God? is he just? or is he unjust? Every pious mind shudders at the question, and cries out that he is just in all his ways. But is he as just as the best of our acquaintance among men? certainly, this at least will be allowed. But would a just man charge any person with a sin committed by another in a different age or country? doubtless he would not. Any in Heaven or Earth that would do this, would declare himself to be a liar, destitute of truth and justice. But this is not the character of our God. It is therefore impossible for him to charge one man with the sin of another. If then we err, *not knowing this scripture*, it is because we don't know, or don't attend to the *truth and justice* of the Deity.

It may be questioned, whether the literal sense of this text does not reproach the divine character more than a denial of his existence. If any should affirm, that there never was such a person as King WILLIAM, would this reflect so injuriously upon that illustrious Patriot, as to assert, that there was indeed such a King, but that he was an unjust Tyrant, who made no distinction between right and wrong, but charged the innocent with the crimes of the guilty? O thou, *who hast compassion upon the ignorant and them that are out of the way*, forgive the undesigned reproaches that rash mortals cast upon thy spotless character.

What absurdities have not been drawn from the scriptures of truth by understanding, in the seeming literal sense, some expressions that are highly figurative, and not to be taken without proper allowances? from this fountain issued the doctrine of Transubstantiation, &c. &c. But the Bible every where supposes us to be reasonable creatures, and leaves room for the exercise of our reason. Whatever texts of scripture may be urged to prove, that bread is to be looked upon as flesh, or that the innocent are

to be regarded as guilty, yet reason and common sense renounce both opinions as impossible. And there are a great many clear texts that show the absurdity of them, and explain the obscure passages alledged in their favour.

If we are heartily disposed to see the Apostles meaning, Rom. v. 19, without being led away by any preconceived scheme, we may find the like forms of speaking that will help to remove the darkness hanging over it. Thus, 2 Cor. v. 21, it is said, *Christ was made sin for us.* But he *knew no sin*; he was *without sin*.—And therefore his being *made sin* for us, can only signify, that his sufferings were an effect of the sins of men; and not that he was a sinner himself. In like manner, when it is affirmed, that *by the disobedience of one many were made sinners*, it can only mean that the degree of suffering here mentioned, is an effect of that one's disobedience. But the only instance of suffering spoken of in this whole celebrated passage is death. From whence it follows, that this is the only effect of the original sin here laid before us.

These that have been briefly referred to, are all the effects of Adam's sin that I can see in the Bible. But in this as in all other things, every man has an equal right to make use of his own own eyes, and to believe what he sees.

But how is it consistent with the justice or goodness of God, that other men should have a less fruitful soil, or endure additional labour and death itself in consequence of a sin in which they were no way concerned? the objection implied here, is made by men of very different principles, and with different views. It is urged by Deists with a design to discredit divine Revelation; and by some Christians taking it for granted, that even this would be a degree of injustice: and if it were, their inference would follow, that the highest injustice may as well be ascribed to God, as the lowest degree of it. But the conclusion of both parties will be overthrown, if it can be made appear, that whatever is really taught in the Bible concerning the effects of the original sin, is not only consistent with justice, but the result of wisdom and goodness in our gracious Governor.

From the history of the Old Testament it appears, that Adam was a creature of the same kind with ourselves. That he was by nature liable to death, is evident from the conduct of God, both before and after he sinned. It has been already observed, that, before the fall, God placed the *tree of life* in the garden of Eden:

Eden : which could serve no other purpose than to prevent or repair the wastes and decays of nature. To put this beyond doubt, we are informed, that God expelled Adam out of Paradise for no other reason, but *lest he should put forth his hand and take of the tree of life, and eat and live for ever.* From whence it is plain, that, had he been admitted to the daily use of this tree, he never would have died, notwithstanding his sin. Immortality therefore, either before or after he sinned, was not natural to him, but depended entirely upon this tree. All then that the Apostle means, when he tells us, that by his sin death entered into the world, is, that upon his disobedience he was banished from the tree of life, and then his mortal frame took its natural course.— And was it not expressive of the divine wisdom and goodness to give Adam such a striking display of his abhorrence of the un-governed indulgence of appetite ? how instructive may this be to all who are acquainted with it !

As Adam was himself naturally mortal, so are his descendants. And can it be imagined, that God is under any obligations of justice to prevent the natural effects of this frame, or to hinder death from taking place ? is it not a matter of meer wisdom, whether he should or not ? is justice at all concerned here ? may not the sovereign Lord of all, without wrong to any, form creatures of our rank, mortal and liable to all the sufferings of this life as well as death ? *shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus ?* would it not be impious in us to murmur, because we are not made Angels ? or something more exalted than he has been pleased to form us ? how ungrateful a reflexion would this be upon our good Creator ! a sin of the same nature with that of the heathen world, who *became vain in their imaginations, neither were they thankful.* In short, it is plain, we now possess a more desirable station than the beasts of the field, or the fowls of the air. Should any be so divested of common sense as to deny this, we have the sure words of Jesus, that *man is better than a sheep, and more valuable than many sparrows.* But our Creator, we know, has formed both sheep and sparrows ; and this, without any injustice to these creatures. From whence it follows, that neither can it be unjust to form *better and more valuable* creatures ; that is, men in our present circumstances. Why then should we complain without cause ?

The *advantages* arising from the shortness of our lives and the certainty of death are obvious. And as to the rest of the earth

earth being less fertile than Paradise, it was manifestly for the benefit of Adam as well as of his posterity. For nothing has a greater tendency to preserve men's innocence, to improve their virtue, or to reform their vicious habits, than constant employment. Idleness is so pernicious, that in common conversation it is a general name for the worst vices. Adam was not allowed to be idle even in Paradise. Had he minded the business assigned him more closely, he would probably have done less mischief. It is certain, industrious people are seldom in the way of being decoyed into vice or folly. In this whole matter then God did not act the part of a judge but of a Father.

Obj. *In a conference with one of his people, he asserted, that man had a power over his own passions. To which the man answered, that could not be; for we were not able to fulfil either the first or second table of the law: To which he replied, that was for want of proper care.*

R. That we have such a power over our passions as to destroy any of them entirely, is neither true nor desirable: for we have occasion for them all. But that we have a certain degree of power over them from God, a power to restrain and direct them, is a matter of feeling and experience attended with very important consequences to our own happiness.

It will be readily granted that the due government of our passions is a very difficult task. The principles designed by the Author of our nature to impell us to action are wisely endued with great force. Our appetites arrive sooner at perfection than the governing powers of reason and conscience. They have in them something more tumultuous, and their objects constantly surround us. Hence the impressions they make are often stronger than the arguments that should restrain them. This was the case with our first parents when they eat the forbidden fruit contrary to the divine command; and this is frequently the case with their descendants. Every one feels the difficulty of resisting the efforts of passion, and controlling the impulse of desire. When we are about to act, the eagerness of passion may not allow us to consider coolly what we are doing. Should the extravagant indulgence of our passions take place for any considerable time, evil habits are formed: and daily experience gives fatal proofs of their influence. If we long continue in a state of absolute slavery to the lawless empire of appetite and passion, a conquest over them becomes almost impossible. Upon all these

accounts,

accounts, the government of our passions is in scripture compared to the hardest enterprizes of human life, such as a race, a warfare, and the like. But still it may be safely affirmed, that success in this is not to be despaired of. For however difficult it may be to exercise a power over our passions, yet it is not impossible. This will be evident, if we consider by whom we are commanded to *keep our hearts*, or govern our passions. It is not by a cruel tyrant armed with omnipotence and delighting in our destruction. No ; it is by the father of mercies, who has no pleasure in the misery of his creatures ; whose authority is more mild and equitable than to enjoin an impossibility. We justly abhor that Egyptian Monarch who required brick of the Hebrews, without allowing them straw. Our Lord has left it as a mark of infamy upon those in his time, who bound heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and laid them upon other men's shoulders, while they did not touch them with one of their fingers. And is it not a part of true religion, a very considerable part of that honour which is due to God, never to ascribe any thing to him which would reflect disgrace upon the worst of men ? *his commands are not grievous* : far less are they *impossible*. *Of ourselves, indeed, we can do nothing*. As we have derived all our capacities from God, so we depend entirely upon him for the exercise of them. But his fatherly goodness is ever disposed to assist us in the paths of virtue and glory. In the right use of what he has already given, his grace will be sufficient for us, his strength will be made perfect in our weakness. In this manner the most powerful passion may be brought *under subjection to the obedience of Christ*. The undoubted prospect of immense wealth and unbounded power is apt to corrupt the mind, and inflame different passions to the highest degree. And yet Moses subdued all these. *He refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season*. The unmerited hatred of the world, the persecutions of this life and the terrors of death are of all external evils the most shocking to human nature ; and yet the illustrious train of Martyrs and Confessors in the Christian Church have *resisted unto blood, striving against sin, and have refused to accept deliverance upon any terms injurious to the cause of God and his Christ, that they might enjoy a better resurrection*. Nor let it be objected, that in these instances men were influenced by grace.— For it is not denied. We have no power or capacity but what

we have received from the Author of every good and perfect gift; and what we still improve by the same grace which first gave them. But what is insisted upon here is, that these men were determined in the government of their passions by rational motives, the force of which every one may feel. It was after *proper care* to exercise his reason in this matter, that Moses rejected the pleasures of sin. He considered, that they were only for a season.

The experience of different men, with regard to the power they have over their passions, must no doubt be very different, according to the different degrees of self discipline they have used. Many are very culpable for the want of this power, because they have not improved what they had. *But in whatever degrees men may differ here, yet a feeling of remorse upon the indulgence of criminal desires seems to be common to all in their cool intervals. And what is this, but an acknowledgment, that the appetite, passion or humour which prompted to this evil action, might have been restrained and governed by *proper care*? for however men may *darken counsel by multiplying words without knowledge*, yet, if we attend to our own experience we shall be convinced, that no person can condemn himself or others for having done what it was impossible to avoid.

It may also be observed, that there never was a man in the world, even the most wicked, but has exercised a power over his passions at some times, and to a certain degree. Anger is allowed to be one of the most furious passions in human nature, and the most difficult to be governed. But let a person ever so little accustomed to self-command, receive the highest affront in the company of those who are much his superiors, and he will confine this passion within the bounds of decency, from a meer regard to good-breeding. How much more easily might this be done upon all occasions by *proper care*, by stronger considerations and an habitual attention?

From all this it follows, that the only reason why we don't succeed in the government of our passions, is our neglecting to make use of the methods which God has appointed for this purpose.

Obj. *One of the members of the Session heard him say, we were all born in a state of grace till we defaced it ourselves.*

R.

* The eternal standard of the Divine conduct, which probably reaches to Angels as well as men, is laid before us, Mat. xxv. 29, *unto every one that improveth, shall be given; and he shall have abundance: but from him that improveth not, shall be taken away even that which he hath.* How alarming and instructive a truth to every mind that is not altogether stupid?

R. *Grace* is but a hard word for *favour*. I affirmed then, that all mankind are born objects of the divine favour, and continue in this happy state, till they exclude themselves from it by sinning against God. And why should this be objected to ? for this reason, I presume, that we are all *shapen in iniquity*. Well, be it so. God makes us with a sinful nature, and he is angry at us for it when he has done ! is this sentiment for the honour of our Maker ? suppose a *watch wrong made*, what would you think of the *watch maker* that would be out of humour at the harmless work of his hands ? if it were true, that God forms us with a corrupt nature, he is certainly a more equitable being than to be offended at us for what we could not possibly help. *Who hath been his counsellor ?* the Author of our nature never consulted any of us concerning the frame he would give us. And as he makes every one of us as he pleases, so he no doubt regards every work of his hands with approbation, 'till it offends him. It must be good in its kind.

Accordingly, we are informed that God blessed our first parents, commanding them to be *fruitful and multiply*. From whence it is justly inferred, that, upon their continuing innocent, their children would have come into the world under the divine blessing. And that their sin made no alteration in this matter is evident from the same benediction pronounced upon the offspring of Noah after the fall. He was another natural head of mankind. And we are told, Gen. ix. 1. that *God blessed him and his sons, and said unto them also, be fruitful and multiply*. Is it not plain from this place, that all the descendants of Noah in every nation under heaven, come into being under the blessing, love and favour of the Almighty ? and what reason is there to doubt of this ? Is it unworthy of the most benevolent being to form all his creatures in love ? none can imagine this. But here there is a confident appeal to experience. To make way for this doctrine, that infants are born under God's wrath and curse, it is asserted that they discover a sinful temper. But how groundless is the assertion ! for what do the sweet little innocents in fact discover but uneasiness upon feeling any pain ? and is not this a necessary call for relief ? they can soon distinguish between sweet and bitter. They are fond of the one and dislike the other.—

R. There is no sin in all this, I hope. But as they arrive at a considerable degree of strength and activity before the powers of reason unfold themselves, so they pursue with little distinction, and

and perhaps with little temper, whatever their appetites crave. Neither is this a crime. Their demands are all natural and easily satisfied.

As they grow up, different passions and principles appear, which are all the work of God, and render them capable of intellectual and moral improvement; while at the same time they expose them to a possibility of doing wrong. A child will soon discover fear upon the apprehension of danger, or anger upon being thwarted. The one is the voice of kind nature warning its youthful charge to fly from every thing that appears hurtful. The other, however it may be corrupted afterwards, is equally necessary, and upon its first appearances, never settles into any thing resembling *malice*. An Apostle recommends it to Christians to be *men* in *understanding*, but in *malice* to be *children*, 1 Cor. xiv. 20. the author of this advice evidently took it for granted that children have no malice. And whoever observes their conduct with any attention, may discern such dispositions in them as may be improved to the best purposes. They are to the last degree curious and inquisitive, ready to ask the most surprising questions. If discreetly treated, they are afraid of offending.— They have also a strong desire of excelling, and a capacity of imitation. They insensibly fall into the manners and language of those they converse with. Children, in short, are, like new wax, capable of receiving any impression. The seeds of virtue may be sown in their tender years, and the habits of it formed to a certain degree. But while they are incapable of governing themselves, they are in particular danger of acquiring vicious dispositions or practices. And when this happens through the mismanagement, vices, ignorance or carelessness of their parents, tutors or companions, the fault is charged upon nature itself.— And since it is *Orthodox Divinity* to blame our Maker, or at best, to lay the load upon old Adam's shoulders, why should we be so simple as to accuse ourselves? one, however, who knew what is in children, entertained a very different opinion of them. He held them up before his grown disciples as the patterns of imitation. He declared, that *of such is the kingdom of heaven*.— But *nothing that is defiled shall enter there*.

If then the prevalence of truth, if love and gratitude to God, with delight under his government, and a chearful, steady obedience to his laws, are of any importance to human happiness, children should be taught that their heavenly father *first* loved them

them certainly and undoubtedly, and that nothing but their own sins can make him displeased with them : instead of being told, that they come into being the objects of his wrath and curse, and are born heirs of hell, without any fault committed by them to incur such terrible displeasure.

No wonder that, when these forbidding errors are presented to the imaginations of youth, they should inspire them with disgust at religion ; and make them fly from all thoughts of such a cruel, tyrannical being as they are informed God is, to sensual gratifications ; or to any amusement that will relieve the mind from such distressing notions. How fatal are the consequences of such destructive mistakes ! how many have they entirely frightened from all serious and useful meditations ! and how have they interrupted the joy, comfort and gratitude of the few comparatively that have been able to dwell upon them !

I would be glad to see it clearly explained, how this scheme has a natural tendency to make men worship God from any other principle than as the Indians are said to worship the Devil ; that is, from *fear* alone, instead of the filial, manly, joyous and reasonable service becoming Christians.

Obj. *In lecturing on the 27th of Matt. where Pilate passed sentence on our Saviour, the Jews cry out, his blood be on us and our children, he said ' it was not to be supposed his blood could be laid to their children's charge, only to the actual murderers themselves.' Whether that be the meaning of the passage, we don't pretend to say. But if we are to judge from facts, the imprecation of the Jews has been fulfilled in a remarkable manner, through a series of 1700 years. And we believe no history can produce an instance of such complicated destruction as has befallen that unhappy people ever since. But Mr. Nelson is so great an enemy to the doctrine of imputed sin and guilt, that he takes a particular pleasure in explaining away every passage in the old or new testament, that has the least appearance to favour it.*

R. Whether the posterity of the Jews that urged Pilate to condemn one in whom they could show no fault, can be justly charged with the blood of this innocent person, every one will determine according to their notions of justice. If you were upon a jury before which some of your fellow subjects were accused of a crime, but you had the clearest evidence that this very crime was committed before they were born, or in a place where they never had been, would you bring in your verdict that they were guilty of this crime ? I presume you would not. Why then should

should we pretend to involve the offspring of the Jews in the crime of their ancestors ? is it because these wrong-headed zealots, in the height of their frantic rage, added this to their other sins, that they wished the murder committed by themselves might be charged upon their children ? Was it not extremely wicked in them to make such a wish ? is it not shocking to humanity as well as to natural justice ? but tho' under the influence of *zeal without knowledge*, they were capable of this and of every species of wickedness, let it be considered that this horrid wish could be executed by none but the Almighty. And shall we expressly make him an accomplice in their crimes ? we have reason to believe, that *God heareth not sinners* : much more, that he will not join with them.

But you say, ' if we are to judge from facts this imprecation has been fulfilled.' Now, the fact you mention is certain, that many of the posterity of these Jews have suffered the most complicated destruction and been a very unhappy people. But of this or any other fact we may assign a wrong cause. Facts are one thing, but the reason of these facts is another and a very different matter. A fact may be true, but the reason given for it may be unjust. To ascribe the destruction and wretchedness of the Jews to the impious desire of their forefathers, is neither supported by scripture nor proper views of the divine perfections. The Apostle Paul gives a very different, and a more sensible account of this fact.—Speaking of the greatest misfortune that befel the immediate children of those Jews, he is so far from thinking of the wild imprecation of their fathers, that he attributes their destruction to themselves, to their own infidelity, Rom. xi. 20, *because of unbelief they were broken off*. In the 22d verse, he intimates that this is a general rule of the divine conduct. He there informs the Gentile converts, that unless they continued in the divine goodness by believing and obeying God, they also should be cut off. And to shew that the misfortunes of the Jews to this day are owing to no other cause but themselves, he declares in the 23d verse, that *they also, if they bide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in*. This is plain language. We need not go so far to account for the destruction and unhappiness of this people. No ; their calamities are derived from causes, the consideration of which may be more useful to ourselves. Their *unbelief of the truth* comprehends all. And this is occasioned by the same causes that hinder many others from believing the truth ; by their attachment

ment to the prejudices of education, by their pride, by the high opinion they have of their blind guides, by their neglect of the evidence which God affords them, by their total engagement in worldly affairs, &c.

But why such an alarm about this matter ? is the remark you complain of dishonourable to God ? or injurious to men ? one would be puzzled to know why you mention it as an objection, but that you explain yourselves. You conclude from it, that I am an enemy to the doctrine of imputed sin and guilt. The unnatural exclamation of these wretches, it seems, you look upon as a proof of this doctrine ? but letting that pass, you may be assured I am no enemy to the doctrine of imputed sin or guilt, where-ever they ought to be imputed. And of this our God is a sufficient judge. It is indeed my fixed opinion, that he will do none of us any wrong : that he will never impute any sin to those who were not guilty of it. But this, it will be said, clears us of Adam's sin. And, alas ! what will become of us then ? for, poor innocents that we are ! we have not sins enough of our own to appear with in judgment. However we may shift without it, where is it asserted in the Bible, that God imputes Adam's offence to his posterity ? or charges them with it ? or punishes them for it ? no where. But this is a current doctrine of scholastic divinity. To make it out, however, even the wise men called *Divines*, are sorely pinched. Their own consciences tell them, that it is a harsh, terrible doctrine, contrary to justice or equity. The Bible no where affirms it in any language but what is capable of a fair interpretation, without fixing upon any such impious meaning. What then shall the advocates for this doctrine do in such distress for want of evidence ? it only remains for them to lay hold upon every thing that *has the least appearance to favour* this tenet : like drowning men that will eagerly catch at a deceitful twig sooner than sink at once.

Whoever is acquainted with systematical writings, may observe in them a constant endeavour to fix some degree of injustice upon the divine conduct in smaller instances, that it may appear the less shocking in the highest. With this view, Divines have laboured to show, that in other cases, children are looked upon as guilty of, and punished for the sins of their parents. If this were true, as it is false, it would not come up to what they intend by it ; because no particular instance of this sort should be extended beyond itself : tho' at the same time, it must be acknowledged,

acknowledged, that if *iniquity* is but once practised by any Governor, there can be no longer any assured confidence of equitable treatment from him.

To remove such a dismal prospect, to settle the joy, hope and confidence of our own minds upon a solid foundation, as well as for the honour of the divine government, instead of *explaining away*, let us attend to the real meaning of those passages in scripture that have the greatest appearance to favour the doctrine of one man's sin imputed to another. If our minds are in a right state, this will give us a very particular pleasure.

Gen. ix. 25, we are told, that Canaan, for the offence of his father Ham, is *curst* with slavery. And 2 Kings, v. 27, it is said, that, in consequence of Gehazi's baseness, the leprosy should affect *his seed for ever*.

It may also be collected from Num. xvi. 27, 33, that the children of Dathan and Abiram suffered death with their wicked fathers. And it is doubtful whether Achan's family were not stoned with him in consequence of his single crime. See Josh. vii. 21—25.

Now, in order to enter into the design of those and the like facts, let it be considered, that this world is a state where the innocent and the guilty are mixed together; that in such a situation the conduct of the vicious must affect the virtuous, even when they are not linked by the nearer ties of nature; and much more when this is the case. Hence it is unavoidable that a wicked man's family must suffer by his crimes. But when this happens, when he squanders away their common goods by rioting and drunkenness, for instance, do we look upon his frugal wife or children to be guilty of his vices? how unrighteous would this judgment be! or when a Nobleman rebels against the government, he not only forfeits his life, but his children are stripped of his estate and honours, which otherwise they would have enjoyed. But does the world regard them as guilty of his rebellion, if they did not join in it? by no means. It is necessary, however, for every wise government, whether human or divine, to give a striking proof of its displeasure against such vices as tend to introduce universal ruin. The disadvantages which children undergo in such cases, are not inflicted by God or man under the notion of a punishment upon them: for they are not esteemed guilty by any just judge. But these sufferings befall them, either as punishments upon their guilty parents, who

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must feel much for their innocent children ; or for their own good, to hinder them from imitating those vices which they find so hurtful ; or for an example to others.

These plain observations being applied to the passages above-mentioned, may serve to vindicate the conduct of God in these particulars, from the aspersions of charging children with the crimes of their parents. It is neither said there, nor any where else in scripture, that children are *guilty* of their parents vices, or *punished* for them : nor are they at all represented as *criminals* for crimes not their own. But there are several instances where parents are said, or threatened, to be punished for their own vices by death, pains or outward distresses inflicted upon their offspring. In this case, children are justly considered as the *dearest enjoyments* of their parents. For the illustration of this, consult Lev. xxvi. 14—30, and Deut. xxviii. 15, 18, 41. with Isai. xiii. 11, 16.

And no person surely can doubt, but that the Author of every gift may, without wrong to any, take back his own creatures at whatever period of life he sees it necessary to answer the purposes of his wisdom and goodness : or may place them in any circumstances that are not inconsistent with their own greatest happiness upon the whole. With this view the wise and good Governor of the world *visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children*, that he may deter men from vice by a regard to their posterity among other motives. Thus, Jer. xxix. 32, *I will punish*, or as the Hebrew word should be translated, being the same that is used in the second commandment, *I will visit Shemaiah and his seed*. The visitation upon Shemaiah was a punishment in the strictest sense, because he was guilty : but that upon his seed was only a wise dispensation to promote virtue and happiness in general. This was also the manifest design of the expressions we still behold of the divine displeasure against the first sin that appeared in the world. The arguments that may be drawn from thence in favour of virtue and against vice, are not without weight.—But however true all this may be, yet *innocence* and *guilt* are *personal* things that cannot be transferred from one to another by any being whatever ; because no being can make that to be *true* which is *false*. And therefore, that we may not be imposed upon in a matter of such importance, let it be religiously attended to, that *suffering* and *punishment* are very *different* things. The innocent may suffer, and often do, for sundry good ends : but

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the innocent can never be punished, because punishment implies guilt. Let us suppose that a man following his lawful business is attacked by a robber, that in his own defence he is killed, that the robber is brought to justice, condemned and executed. Here two men are deprived of life. But though their suffering is the same, do we feel in the same manner for them? don't we look upon the one as suffering by the wickedness of another, while we regard the other as punished for his own crime? to speak of suffering and punishment as the same, is confounding things that are in their own nature extremely distinct. It is an impropriety of language, an unscriptural blunder, that runs thro' the writings of many Divines, and occasions no small perplexity upon this and some other subjects in Divinity. It frequently happens in the world, and we are often told in sacred history, that the consequences of one man's actions reach to others, either in the natural course of things, or by particular divine appointment for excellent reasons. But one may venture to assert, that it is neither agreeable to the design of human laws, or to the common sense of Mankind, nor is it said in the Bible, either in the case of Adam or any other, that one man is *punished* for the crime of another. And

Consequently, the argument brought from thence to prove that one man's sin is imputed to another, in any case, falls to the ground.

Obj. Another passage in his discourses, which in our opinion has no favourable aspect on divine revelation is this. In lecturing upon Mat. where the Pharisees put a question to our Saviour, was it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause, he said our Lord avoided giving them a direct answer, but very wisely reasoned with them from the principles and constitution of human nature. For, says he, suppose a revelation from heaven should teach us any doctrines inconsistent with the principles of human nature, we are not to receive them. For we may be mistaken in a revelation from heaven. Now, according to this method of reasoning, the principles of human nature is to be the sole test of what is a divine revelation and what not. We believe that the scriptures of the old and new testament contain nothing contradictory to sound reason, but in our opinion many things directly contrary to the principles of human nature in its present depraved state. For instance, the command which God gave to Abraham to sacrifice his son. Could any thing be more directly contrary to the principles of human nature than for a good and loving father to slay his innocent son? Had he,
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viz. *Abrabam, acted on Mr. Nelson's principles, he would at once have rejected the command of God. Another precept taught us in the new testament, to forgive our enemies, a thing most inconsistent with the proud depraved principles of human nature. But above all, that an innocent person should die a sacrifice for the sins of a guilty world, with many more that might be mentioned, from which we would remark, that such forms of speech cannot in the least tend to edify his hearers : but in this age of infidelity may have a most dangerous effect in leading unwary and untinking people to a disbelief of many parts of divine revelation.*

R. We are informed, Matth. xix. 3, 4, that the Jews applied to our Lord for the decision of a question much disputed in their schools concerning the extent of divorces, or the particular occasions upon which they were lawful ; and this, not with a desire to be instructed, but to get an opportunity of reviling his character, and rendering him odious to one or the parties. *The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause ?* To this designing enquiry he gave no direct answer, but with consummate prudence turned their thoughts to such principles as would render a just conclusion almost unavoidable. In this he acted with real friendship, making every proper allowance for their prejudices, and at the same time giving them a fair opportunity to be instructed. *Have ye not read, says he, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female ?* that is, an equal number of each sex. He appealed to the constitution of human nature, and left it to themselves to draw from thence the designs of our Creator. Now, from this manner of reasoning observed by him who knew what was in man, the remark appeared to me to arise which in your opinion 'has no favourable aspect on divine revelation.' In representing it, indeed, you omit one word, probably by defect of memory, which gives it a turn somewhat different, and makes it appear the more exceptionable. The remark itself was, if a revelation *pretending* to come from heaven should teach us any doctrine inconsistent with the constitution of human nature, we ought not to receive it. Why ? because we may be deceived by such pretensions. The religion of Mahomet makes the high claim of being a divine revelation. Men with all these pretensions may design to impose upon us ; and one of the strongest arguments we can have to the contrary, is the goodness of their doctrines, the conformity of them to the judging powers

powers of our nature, reason and conscience. This being kept in view, the observation you think so dangerous will appear to be no more than what the Apostle John teaches, 1 Ep. chap. iv. 1. *Beloved, believe not EVERY spirit, but try the spirits, whether they be of God. For many false prophets have gone out into the world.* This would be a strange advice, if we were not capable of making such a trial; or if we were to receive any thing contrary to the result of it when made. If the principles of human nature were not the *sole test* of what is a divine revelation or not, why did an Apostle recommend it to human creatures, *not to believe EVERY spirit, but to try the spirits?* But without insisting upon a matter so plain, let it be observed, that we agree in reality upon this subject, and differ only in words. You allow, that the scriptures contain nothing contradictory to sound reason; which is all I have said; but, you think, many things contrary to human nature when depraved; and I am quite of the same opinion. Sound reason and corrupted reason are, no doubt, as opposite as truth and error. An attention to this would have prevented all the needless trouble of collecting so many instances for the illustration of what you affirm. In these you seem to triumph, while you have entirely gone away from the consideration of my assertion; nay indeed, after you have confessed the truth of it, and are only fighting with a shadow of your own raising. You only affirm, that the command given to Abraham, the forgiveness of our enemies, and the sacrifice of Christ, are contrary to depraved reason, which I never denied; and of the truth of which I am fully persuaded. But you grant, that these things, being all contained in the scriptures, are not contradictory to sound reason; which is the very thing I asserted.

At the same time you remark, that *such forms of speech*, meaning, I presume, the observation you object to, *cannot in the least edify my bearers.* Here I must beg leave to differ from you.—Must not a full conviction that the scriptures contain nothing unworthy of God to reveal, or of men to receive, inspire Christians with the highest regard for this Revelation, and lead them to a right understanding of its doctrines, which are all free from absurdity? and must not the true sense of these edify them in the highest degree? the good effect which this or any thing else may have upon *the unwary* and *the unthinking*, is indeed very uncertain. The thoughtless tribe abuse the best gifts of God, their own reason, health, &c. nay, men of this character wrest the word

word of God to their own destruction: and doubtless they may pervert any observations that can be made upon it.

But this objection of yours, compared with some that are above, seems to be founded upon a presumption, that the reason of mankind is somehow depraved by the sin of Adam. Of this however, so far as I know, there is not the least hint in the rule of our faith. And if we pay any regard to facts, Adam certainly reasoned as weakly as any among his posterity has ever done, when he concluded to transgress the law of his Maker upon the first temptation that befell him.

The power of reasoning, which heaven in its love bestows upon the human race, is evidently intended to lead us to just conclusions concerning truth, duty and happiness. When this capacity is perverted by negligence, by the influence of any ungoverned passion, by the prejudices of a wrong education, or by temporal interest, then it is *corrupted*: and this, in proportion to the degree in which all or any of these causes may prevail. Its determinations in such circumstances must be false and delusive: and such a perversion of this divine faculty is the source of all the sin that can exist in nature: while a due cultivation of it, with a steady adherence to its sacred dictates, puts and keeps us in the possession of true religion and virtue. It is only by the exercise of reason that we can reap advantage from any other gift of God. Without this we could no more receive a divine revelation than the beasts of the field. How unfriendly then to Mankind, how ungrateful to the Author of this invaluable gift, is every attempt to render it useless!

The Popish Clergy led the way in this as they have done almost in every error. They saw reason staring them in the face at every turn, and beating them out of their wild imaginations: from whence they wisely endeavoured to discard it for their own peace. And as the Protestant Clergy still retain many of their mistakes, they behave in the very same manner. No wonder that men conscious of entertaining unreasonable doctrines, should declaim against reason. It is their enemy. And if the laity are once persuaded to renounce the reason which God has imparted for their direction, they are completely prepared to swallow any doating dream or idle tale that is proposed to them. It is hard to see what these gentlemen can mean, who raise an impious clamour against reason, but to deprive us of the light which our Maker has given us, that their own darkness may meet with the better

better reception. They address us in this strain, 'put out your eyes, brethren, and we will show you rare sights.' But is it not more likely, we shall see the truth and beauty of religion by retaining and using the eyes we have received for this very purpose? many indeed, who profess a regard for revealed religion, represent the sacred scriptures as containing several doctrines that are manifestly unreasonable: and therefore they discourage the use of reason and all enquiry in religious matters, as dangerous or hurtful. Of this weakness the enemies of Revelation have taken the greatest advantage. In this they glory, that the advocates for the divine origin of the Bible allow, it contains unreasonable doctrines: which, were it true, would be the best reason in the world for rejecting it. But this argument takes its whole force from the follies and mistakes of men. As God is the Author of reason in every one of us, he certainly never can nor ever will reveal any thing inconsistent with this: because he cannot contradict himself. Let us briefly consider the instances you mention in opposition to this, that we may see whether they are not all agreeable to the reason we now have, however it may be called *depraved* reason.

The first is the command given to Abraham to offer his son for a burnt-offering. You ask, *could any thing be more contrary to the principles of human nature than for a good and loving father to slay his innocent son?* And it may be readily answered, that nothing could be more contrary to paternal affection. But will you not allow, that there is a principle in human nature, to which all our affections should be subject? might not this command be made known to Abraham with such incontestible evidence, that he could not doubt the truth of its being a *divine* command? and is there not something within us assuring us, we ought to deny ourselves the indulgence of any affection sooner than disobey God? this surely is the dictate of reason, and this was the governing principle in Abraham's conduct. His strong manly reason entirely prevented the disobedience that might have been expected from the partial affection of a weak father. It may be fairly doubted, whether Adam, with all his boasted original righteousness, perfect reason, &c. would have behaved so rationally; probably because he wanted *experience*, which Abraham had, and which *finishes* every thing. Be this as it will, Abraham acted upon the just and reasonable maxim, that it is better to suffer in the most tender part than to sin. He had of-

ten experienced the goodness and power of God to accomplish things in themselves very improbable. This afforded materials for his reason to conclude, that in obeying God, even in this difficult and trying case, he could be at no loss. In this light, the Apostle, in the xi. ch. of the Epistle to the Hebrews, mentions his faith in God and obedience to him with all the praise due to such noble fortitude. *He reasoned, * that God was able to raise up Isaac even from the dead.* His readiness to obey God was so far from being contrary to the highest principle in human nature, that it was the effect of *reasoning*. And the event shows, that this command, which appears harsh and severe, and about which there has been so much dust raised by Deists and others, without taking in all the circumstances of the fact; I say, the event shows, that it was never meant by the Almighty to be put into execution, but was only intended for Abraham's information and improvement, to give him a farther proof, that he would still be safe in obeying God without reserve. It also demonstrates how wisely he *reasoned* when he determined to obey his Maker, whenever he was sure of having received a command from him. You affirm indeed, 'had Abraham acted upon my principles he would at once have rejected the command of God.' But the injustice of this free assertion is evident from what has been said. It is plain from the authority of the Apostle as well as from the nature of the thing, that Abraham did not act a part inconsistent with human nature, but perfectly agreeable to that principle of our nature, which *should* govern in *all*, and *does* prevail in all *good* men. He *reasoned* himself into faith and obedience. Before you can prove what you affirm, you must either show, that Abraham did not act according to reason; or, that reason is not a principle of human nature.

The precept, to forgive our enemies, you represent as opposite to pride and depravity; which is very true. No proud, depraved man, while he continues in this temper, will forgive his enemies. But whether pride and depravity are constituent parts of human nature, or whether they are *corruptions* of our own making, is another and a very different question. *Proper care* sets this precept in a reasonable light. It suggests, that our enemies either have cause to be such, or they have not. If they have, it points out the methods of reconciliation: if they have not,

* This is the literal English of the Greek word translated, *accounting*, Heb. xi. 19, which indeed has the same meaning.

not, it enables us to see, that they are mistaken in their judgment, or under the influence of some ungoverned passion : in either of which cases they are the natural objects of pity and forgiveness.

It might also be shown, that your last instance, the doctrine of an innocent person's dying a sacrifice for the sins of a guilty world, is equally consistent with reason ; not perhaps as it may be explained by men under the influence of *revenge*, and imagining that God is like themselves : but as it is taught in the sacred scriptures ; the language of which, alluding to customs unknown to us, and adapted to the eastern taste, should ever be understood in a sense consistent with the divine perfections. To point out the harmony between scripture and reason upon this subject would require a treatise by itself. To those who entertain perplexed or mistaken notions of this doctrine, it may justly appear very unreasonable. But they who have made themselves acquainted with it, will discern a peculiar propriety in that circumstance which in the view of others is most absurd, that of an INNOCENT person's dying for the guilty. For who can be so well qualified to *remove sin*, or to make men virtuous by whatever means are necessary for this end ? a vicious man would be very unfit to *reform* a guilty world. Whoever would succeed in *putting away sin*, must be prepared, like Jesus Christ, even to *sacrifice* his life in the glorious undertaking ; not to shrink from any dangers that may threaten, or be overcome by all the buffetings of adverse fortune ; but to persevere in *obedience unto death*. So far is this from being contrary to reason, that it is in the nature of the thing absolutely necessary.

Great, unspeakably great, glorious and comfortable are the discoveries of Divine Revelation beyond what is made known by the mere light of reason. But let us never raise the former upon the ruins of the latter. The one is no enemy to the other. These heavenly guests belong both to the same family. They are children of the same father : but Reason is Revelation's elder brother, under whose guardianship it appears in the world with a good grace and with great advantage, strong and invulnerable ; but stript of this protection, it is naked and defenceless, ready to be devoured by every beast of prey.

Obj. *He likewise took an opportunity to explain two texts of scripture. The one was, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. He said we were not to take that in the literal sense, for that could not be the true meaning of it.*

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And after saying a great deal to make the text speak a different sense, he concluded the whole by a similitude of a gentleman setting up for a member of parliament. Another text in the same chapter, Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated, the children before they had done either good or evil. He said, the common reading could not possibly be the meaning of it. And after spending a great deal of time in the explanation thereof, he said, the true meaning was neither more nor less than that he loved Esau in a lower degree than Jacob. We submit to the Reverend Presbytery, whether this be the sense in which the Westminster and other orthodox Divines have taken it. We are told that Esau could not get repentance though he sought it with tears; and how Mr. Nelson will reconcile that to his less degree of love we know not.

R. It appears from the context compared with the history to which it refers, that the first of these texts, Rom. ix. 16, is to be taken in a sense strictly literal, nor did I ever teach the contrary. This verse is evidently a conclusion drawn from the rest of the ch. where the Apostle alludes to the history of a family in the Old Testament. And as he is here reasoning with the Jews, whom he justly supposes well acquainted with their own history, he only hints at these things. From the twentieth chapter of Genesis to the twenty-eighth inclusive, we are informed, that Abraham *willed* Ishmael should have the preference of Isaac in obtaining the blessing promised to his descendants; and that Isaac afterwards *willed* the same to Esau above Jacob; and also, that Esau himself *run* for this purpose. But notwithstanding all this *willing and running*, God in his infinite wisdom intended to bestow the extraordinary advantages promised to Abraham's family upon Isaac and Jacob: and the divine decree could not be frustrated by all the endeavours of their competitors. In this manner the text was explained to you, and this still appears to be all that is meant by it: not as some persons of a melancholy cast have understood it to confirm themselves in despair; or as others of a dissolute turn have applied it to make themselves easy in their vices; as if it signified that our pious desires, or upright actions are not well received by the Almighty, nor sure of success; but that at a certain time, and in an arbitrary, irresistible manner, God shows mercy to some particular persons, and reclaims them, while he damns all the rest, however thoughtful and diligent they may be to act a worthy part. No; this figurative sense, that has been put upon the text, is not only quite out of the Apostle's design and argument here, but is in itself

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highly absurd, inconsistent with all the moral perfections of God, and with other express passages of scripture. When the phrases to *will* and to *run* are taken in a figurative sense, and relate to the attainment of virtue and happiness, we are well assured, there is no danger of a disappointment, but from ourselves. Rev. xxii. 17, *whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.* 1 Cor. ix. 24. *so run that ye may obtain* Here the Apostle by alluding to races well known among the Corinthians, animates them to obedience with the undoubted prospect of their being crowned with success and glory upon exerting themselves in a proper manner. This comfortable use he makes of it himself in the 26th v. *I therefore so run*, says he, *not as uncertainly*; 'not as if I were afraid that my God will defeat or overlook my sincere purposes of obeying him and being happy.' These declarations, clear and to the point, prove, that the text in the Romans relates only to what the Apostle is there speaking of, the outward circumstances of Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob; that in consequence of the design of God, the younger of each family was exalted to great honour and dignity, while the other, notwithstanding all his endeavours, was placed in a situation less advantageous. Of what use then, it may be asked, is this text to us? it tends to moderate our ambitious desires after any external privileges or distinctions. For as our chief good does not rise from things of this nature, so it is possible that our warmest pursuits of them may be frustrated. If we are fortunate enough not to have experienced this, or so inattentive to the course of human affairs as not to have observed it around us, this text serves to inform us of the uncertainty of all outward advantages or expectations. A gentleman, for instance, may exert himself to be member of parliament, he may run with all his might to obtain this rank, he and his friends may heartily join their interests, and yet be disappointed. In cases of this kind, *it is not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.* But as our supreme happiness consists in the perfection of our nature, in the practice of virtue, in the friendship of God, so it is impossible we can fall short of this if we are really in quest of it. Here God is undoubtedly for us, and who can be against us? *he will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax*: He will not discourage the first dawns of virtue, but kindle the smallest sparks of love to God and goodness into a triumphant flame. It is indeed God that worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure,

pleasure, by the capacities he affords us, assisted with sundry revelations of his will, and such degrees of direction and assistance as are fit in our circumstances. Of this we can never expect too much from the divine goodness, if we only attend to the method in which he bestows his favours; that is, in the right use of what he has already given us. For while he works in us, he works by us.—*Unto every one that IMPROVETH shall be given, and he shall have abundance: But from him that improveth NOT, shall be taken away even that which he hath.* Matth. xxv. 29.—Agreeable to which our Lord exhorts his disciples with great fervency, Luke xiii. 24, *strive to enter in at the strait gate; strive, exert your utmost vigour, strain every nerve, for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in*, denoting their careless, unconcerned manner, *but they shall not be able*, they shall not prevail, because some sinful or unworthy pursuit has the ascendant in their minds.—*With their mouths they may show much love, but their heart goeth after covetousness*, or some other vice.

The true sense of the other text you mention appears to me of such importance, that I shall here offer to your consideration what may be necessary to set it in a clear light. Rom. ix. 13, we have a quotation from the old testament, where God speaking of his conduct towards the Jews, says, *was not Esau Jacob's brother? yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau*, Mal. i. 2, 3. But wherein did this hatred consist? or how far did it extend? the word *hated*, in the English tongue, universally signifies *malice* or *ill-will*. And this sense the original word answering it often bears in the Bible, but not always. We are told, that God hated Esau: and that, you imagine, before he was *born, having neither done good nor evil*. But shall we from thence rashly conclude, that God, who is love itself, entertained ill-will against a person who had never offended him? what would you think of any of your acquaintance that would have a malicious design against one of his neighbour's innocent children? would you esteem it for your honour, if this were reported of yourselves? would you not renounce the thought with abhorrence, and hear the charge with a just indignation? and shall we ascribe that to the God of heaven which would be a reproach to human nature? and this, without any necessity? is not the Bible sufficiently plain about the meaning of the word *hate* in the age and country where it was wrote? for example, Luke. xiv. 29, *if any man come to me, and HATE not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren*

brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. Can it be inferred from this text, that, in order to be a Christian, a man must entertain evil designs against his dearest friends? no; it is universally and justly understood to mean only this, that if any person would approve himself a real Christian, he must have a higher regard to the cause of truth and virtue than to all worldly connections, his own life not excepted. And why is the word *bate* understood here without dispute to signify a lower degree of love? because every one sees, it would be unworthy of a good man to bear ill-will to any person. But has not the same reason great additional strength with regard to the other text? would not this temper be much more unworthy of that mind, which is the most unmixed benevolence? which dwells in everlasting love? unprovoked ill-will is the worst thing that can be ascribed to the worst being in the universe. And shall we attribute this to the God whom we serve?

There is yet another passage that throws still more light upon this dark place. Gen. xxix. 30, we are told, that *Jacob—loved Rachel more than Leah.* And in the next verse it is said,—*the Lord saw that Leah was hated.* But to what did this hatred amount? the former verse answers the question. Jacob loved her *less* than Rachel.

After considering these places, what impartial, unprejudiced mind can be in doubt concerning the meaning of the passage in Malachi which the Apostle quotes? in the beginning of the first chapter the Prophet reproaches the Israelites with ingratitude for the distinguishing favours they had received above the neighbouring nations: which makes it evident, that by Jacob and Esau in this place he understood their descendants, the Jews and Edomites. The former enjoyed very great blessings above the latter. The mountains and the heritage of the one were often laid waste for the dragons of the wilderness: while the other inhabited the pleasant fields of Canaan overflowing with milk and honey. The one was a chosen nation favoured with the oracles and promises of God. Of them according to the flesh, Christ came. The other lived under the meer light of nature. They were not, however, forsaken of heaven, tho' loved in a lower degree and possessed of smaller advantages than the Israelites. It is said, Deut. x. 18, that God *loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment*: and none but temporal blessings were mentioned even to the Jews. Of the Edomites in particular Moses

recounts

recounts many Dukes and Kings : and in succeeding periods we find them sometimes more powerful than Jacob's family. In David's time, 'tis true, *all they of Edom became his servants*, 2 Sam. viii. 14. but under the reign of Jehoram they recovered and *made a King over themselves*, 2 Kings, viii. 20. And in the days of Ahaz they revenged the affront by *smiting Judah and carrying away captives*, 2 Chron. xxviii. 17.

I am not ignorant of what you insinuate, tho' you wisely forbear speaking it out, that Divines have urged this text as a proof of their doctrine that God made the greater part of mankind with no other design than to send them to hell : of which unhappy number they reckon Esau one without question. What the condition of Esau may be I dare not pronounce. From any thing we find in his actions, he may possibly be in as good a state as Jacob. The one was a profane person, the other a deceiver.* These things are merely related in the sacred history, without the least approbation ; and without censure too, because every one may see from the rules there laid down, that they are extremely censurable. Nor does the rest of Jacob's story show, that he was blameless, tho' God did not alter the design of making his posterity a peculiar people to preserve the knowledge and worship of himself among the nations. However this may be, it does not appear from this text, that Esau was born without a possibility of being finally happy. Whether such an opinion has not been wrested from it by running away with the sound without regarding the sense, may be determined from what has been said.

The first argument you urge against the interpretation above given of this text is a broad hint, that the Westminster and other Orthodox Divines have not taken it in such a sense. But ought we not to obey Jesus in his command to call no man upon earth *Master* ? foreseeing the wretched fruits of implicit faith, he strictly and solemnly enjoined it upon Christians to regard one another as *brethren*, upon a level, having no authority or jurisdiction over each other's consciences, but entitled to all the offices of mutual love and forbearance. And why call we him *Lord*, and do not the things which he has commanded ? by a commission from him, you and I have as good a right as the Westminster or other orthodox Divines to consider and understand the religion of our common Master. And our neglecting to improve

* Jacob's fault was, that he did not, in the practice of his duty, leave it to the wisdom of God to execute the divine purposes, like the good Abraham.

improve this privilege is at once our very great crime, and unspeakable loss. Despising his authority we take *other Lords to rule over us.* One is of Calvin, another of Arminius, as if any of us were baptized in the name of Calvin, as if Arminius had been crucified for us ! how the Westminster Divines understood the text you mention need not be enquired. If they brought it as a proof, that Esau had not fair play for life eternal, it only confirms their own observation, that *all Synods may err.*

Give me leave to ask whether this argument of yours does not breathe the very spirit of Popery. The authority of their Church and Clergy is the chief support of their most glaring absurdities, tho' they endeavour to squeeze in the Bible to their aid too. They are taught, for example, that upon certain solemn occasions they eat and drink their God. To make this go down, they are assured, that this divine doctrine has been entertained by the Church of Christ from the very beginning, by thousands of spiritual fathers, great and good men, learned in all arts and sciences as well as in Divinity : in short, that it is the opinion of the *orthodox* all over the world ; that none but *heretics* deny it ; that nothing awaits such but hell and damnation. These religious principles being deeply rooted in their pupils minds, they proceed one step farther. To compleat the work, they confidently affirm, that this is no more than what is plainly taught in the word of God. They pompously produce chapter and verse, where Christ does indeed assert of the sacramental bread, that it is his body, and of the wine, that it is his blood. In this their hopeful scholars triumph as the most undoubted evidence. They will by no means hearken to a rational explication of these texts from parallel figurative places, but are ready to persecute, with the keenest zeal, all those mistaken Heretics who differ from them.

It is in truth hard to know what precise meaning *Protestant* churches annex to the words 'orthodox,' and 'heterodox.' All parties claim the former with eagerness, & renounce the latter with horror : by which conduct they are made to mean nothing but the cunning or arrogance of those who equip themselves with the one, and bespatter their opponents with the other. The root of the matter seems to be this : The genius of our several Protestant constitutions is exactly the same with that of Popery, and must therefore be supported by methods in fact the same. But the Popish divines could never have enslaved the minds of Christians without calling *infallibility* to their assistance. This word, how-
ever

ever, Protestants *dare* not use. It is too bare-faced ; it is odious to the people. What pillar then shall they find to support their tottering power ? As it wants truth for its foundation, there must be a master-stroke of art ; otherwise the building must go to ruin. To prevent this fatal catastrophe, the word *orthodoxy* comes in the room of *infallibility*. A lucky hit ! this works like magic upon the minds of the croud, and awes them into a ready submission. Whatever priest hath sagacity enough to bring this into repute should be sainted, have a temple dedicated to him, and an annual holy-day appointed to perpetuate the remembrance of the signal services done to his brethren. For, where-ever a decent regard is paid to *orthodoxy*, how short and ealy an end does it make of all controversies ! how much preferable, in many cases, to the dangerous way of going to the Bible for proof ? In short, this wondrous word answers the same purposes with its predecessor, *infallibility*. It reconciles flat contradictions, and converts error into sound doctrine. The Pope's interposition is in few countries equally revered, and no where more decisive.

Should any be curious enough to ask for a particular explanation of these hard words, 'orthodox' and 'heterodox,' that abound with hidden charms, I cannot gratify them better than by repeating a conversation of two countrymen that happened to be present at a public dispute between their neighbouring clergy, in which these expressions made up a great part of their discourse. This excited the curiosity of one of the hearers, who, in his way home, enquired of his more intelligent neighbour, what these words meant. Indeed, my friend, says the other, I will satisfy you in that. You have your *dox*, and I have my *dox*. When our *doxes* agree, whether they be right or wrong, we call one another *orthodox* : But when they differ, we are to each other *beterodox*.

What you next urge against the explication that was given of Rom. ix. 13, deserves the highest regard, because it is taken from the sacred scriptures. We are told, you observe, that *Esau could not get repentance, tho' he sought it with tears*. And 'how this can be reconciled to a less degree of love, you know not.' This, however, is no proof, that these texts cannot be reconciled. The place you refer to, is in the Epistle to the Hebrews, chap. xii. 17. in the foregoing verse Esau is characterized as a *profane* person, that is, one who had not a just respect for God in his mind, nor a proper sense of the worth of his gifts. How does this appear ? by selling so high a privilege as his birth-right for a morsel of meat.

meat. This conduct, it is plain from the context, the Apostle mentions in order to warn Christians against falling from the grace of God by undervaluing or despising the blessings they had received. That this might make a deeper impression upon them, he alarms them with the fatal consequences of such folly and ingratitude, by dwelling upon the case of Esau. *For ye know, says he, how that afterwards when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected : for he found no place of repentance, tho' he sought it carefully with tears.*

The Apostle's address to the Hebrews in these words, *ye know*, shows that they were well acquainted with the matter he is speaking of. This they must have learned from the history of the Old Testament, the best expositor of all those places relating to Esau. To this then let us have recourse for the meaning of the text you quote. What repentance was it that he sought with tears, and did not obtain ? the only thing of this kind which the Hebrews could *know*, is contained at large in the xxviii of Genesis, from the 30th verse to the 40th.

In the 33d we find Isaac expressing his surprise and amazement in broken language ; but in the conclusion of it, either moved by an immediate impulse from heaven, or probably calling to mind the promise made to Rebecca, that *the Elder should serve the Younger*, he confirms what he had done with the most determined declaration, *yea, and he shall be blessed.* This was his fixed resolution. *And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said, bless me, even me also, O my father.* But did all this produce any *change of mind* in Isaac, as the word *repentance* literally signifies ? not the least. So far from it, that he expressly informs him, the thing could not be altered. He said, *thy brother came with subtilty, and hath taken away thy blessing.* Upon which Esau, after some pertinent reflections, intreats his father in the most earnest manner, *hast thou not reserved a blessing for me ?* but Isaac is still inflexible. *Behold, says he, I have made him thy Lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants.* But Esau yet persists to seek his father carefully with tears to repent, *hast thou but one blessing, my father ? bless me, even me also, O my father.* *And Esau lift up his voice and wept.* And even then, Isaac, after mentioning different advantages which his family would enjoy, still takes care to inform him, that the blessing given to Jacob was not to be recalled, but to take place ; *thou shalt serve thy brother.*

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Thus Esau having consented to part with his birth-right, the gift of heaven to him, was rejected from inheriting the peculiar blessing promised to the posterity of Abraham, and found no way to change his father's mind in this matter, tho' he sought it carefully with tears. But how is this inconsistent with a lower degree of divine love towards him? does not the history we have been considering rather confirm this? we there see, that Esau was by no means, nor in any degree, born an object of the divine displeasure. He did not indeed obtain what the Apostle calls by way of eminence, *the blessing*, the singular blessing secured to Abraham's offspring by the original grant. But he was not cursed. No; he was blessed with many and great privileges. Verse 39, *Isaac his father said unto him, thy dwelling shall be of the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of the heaven from above: and by thy sword shalt thou live*, signifying that his family would be a rich and warlike people. And tho' he subjects them to the descendants of Jacob, yet he tells him, *it shall come to pass, when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck*: as the Edomites did in the reign of Ahaz.

If we compare the blessing pronounced upon Jacob, verses 28 and 29, with that here given to Esau, we shall find the most considerable difference consisting in the superiority conferred upon the Jews above the Edomites. To the one, the grant is, *be Lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down before thee*.—Upon the other the injunction is laid, *thou shalt serve thy brother*.

Here the effects of the higher and lower degrees of love are clearly marked out: nor was the Apostle ignorant of this. For tho' he justly observes here, that Esau was rejected from inheriting *the blessing*, meaning the distinguishing blessing that raised the Israelites above all nations, yet, agreeable to scripture-history, he takes notice in the xi. 20. of the same Epistle, that *by faith Isaac blessed Jacob AND ESAU concerning things to come*.

But orthodox Divines, in order to support their opinions, that Esau was not only born under the wrath and curse of God, *tho' he had done no evil*; but also, that there was a decree against his being delivered from this state until he should be committed to the flames of hell for ever; to countenance these doctrines, I say, they suppose that Heb. xii. 17, relates to his seeking repentance from God. This *supposition*, however, appears from a due attention to the history of Esau, to be altogether groundless. If there were not such clear historical evidence to show the absurdity

of this, it might be proved to be absurd from other plain passages which directly contradict such a notion. For instance, 2 Pet. iii. 9, where our heavenly father is represented as *willing, that ALL should come to repentance*. And Heb. xi. 6, the Apostle lays it down as an article, the belief of which is absolutely necessary to the very being of religion, that *God is the rewarder of all them that diligently seek him*. But to seek him carefully with tears, would surely be seeking him diligently : from whence it follows, that this place has no relation to his seeking God, or repentance from him. And therefore we cannot justly conclude from it, that he was unsuccessful in the endeavours he might use to obey God and obtain happiness.

What has been said is perhaps sufficient for the explication of these texts. But as they are immediately connected with a subject of the last importance to the honour of God and the comfort of our own minds, 'tis hoped an attempt to explain it briefly here will not be looked upon as useless or improper.

These two opinions seem to be either express or strongly implied in your objection ; first, that God forms a part of mankind with no other view than to render them miserable : secondly, that, as he entertains nothing but evil designs against such men, he is neither disposed to encourage them in the practice of righteousness, nor to receive their warmest endeavours to please him. And as these are the avowed principles of orthodox Divines, 'tis presumed you'll esteem them no reproach.

But whatever *Names* or *Authority* may be brought in favour of these sentiments, let us coolly enquire, whether there be not sufficient evidence to believe, in opposition to them, that God earnestly desires all mankind may be virtuous and happy.

That God delights in virtue, and is sincerely willing that all men should keep all his commandments always, or speedily return from any violation of them, will be evident, if we consider, in the first place, *the perfections of his nature*. We must remove every vicious quality from the character of God. *Far be it from the Almighty, that he should do wickedness*. Iniquity is so abominable to him that he cannot so much as look upon it. Every excellence must be ascribed to him, and that in the highest degree ; unchangeable truth, impartial equity, never-failing goodness, long-suffering, patience, tender pity, melting compassion and abundant mercy. These, *these are the glory* of the divine nature, the delightful subject of the most pleasing contemplation to

Angels

Angels and men. But who can believe such a *holy* God as this indifferent to the actions of his reasonable creatures? if he abhors vice, must he not desire it may be banished from them in this world? *the righteous Lord loveth righteousness.* And can he love virtue, and yet be unconcerned whether it fade or flourish? can he esteem loving-kindness, tender mercy, justice and truth, and yet not desire that their influence may be universal among men? is there a good man upon earth that would not wish the whole human race to become such? certainly there is not. And shall not God desire the same to his whole rational creation? *shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker?* Away with the irreligious thought! let us never doubt the sincerity of God, nor limit the holy one of Israel.—This is his desire concerning all mankind, that they may walk according to all his commandments blameless.

This may be farther illustrated from the constitution of the human soul. There we may discern the intention of our creator. He has made all men capable of knowing between good and evil. We perceive a difference between virtue and vice as clearly as between light and darkness. The one commands our approbation. The other raises disgust. These are the impressions of a divine hand upon the whole human race. Even *the Gentiles which have not the law*, says St. Paul, *do by nature the things contained in the law; these having not the law are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written on their hearts.* Rom. ii 14, 15. And though these impressions may be greatly weakened by habitual wickedness, yet they can never be wholly defaced. But what is the design of such a law? why is it inscribed in such legible characters upon the hearts of all men? is it not, that they may obey it? doubtless. It may be considered with the utmost propriety, as the voice of God our Maker calling upon every one of us to fly from vice and embrace virtue.

In how clear a manner is the same important lesson taught in the sacred scriptures! A specimen of this we have Deut. v. 29, where God himself speaking of the whole Jewish nation, says in the spirit of a father, *O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me and keep all my commandments always!* and Tit. ii. 11, 12, *the grace of God—bath appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.*

This being established beyond dispute, that God desires *all* may

may be pious and virtuous, it directly follows, that he desires may be happy. Since he commands us to use the means, certainly wishes we may obtain the end. Does he recommend to us all to *fear him and keep all his commandments always* ? it is beyond doubt with the view mentioned in the same place, *that it may be well with us for ever*. What but our own happiness could he propose by enjoining obedience upon us ? the words of Eliphaz set this in a clear light, Job xxii. 2, *can a man be profitable to God, as he that is wise may be profitable to himself ? is it any good to the Almighty, that thou makest thy ways perfect ?* no certainly. And therefore his care to make his will known to us is entirely disinterested and for *our good*. Agreeable to which the light the world informs his disciples, that having done all those things which are commanded, they are *unprofitable servants*. Their services cannot possibly be of any advantage to the Almighty. Thus, the practice of true religion is enjoined with no other view than that it may be well with us now and for ever. *As righteousness tendeth to life ; so he that pursueth evil, pursueth it to his own death*. Misery is the attendant of vice ; but the observance of the divine laws has an evident tendency to promote our temporal as well as eternal happiness ; to prolong our lives, to increase our riches, and to procure love and esteem from our acquaintance. These fruits may indeed be blasted by accidents entirely out of our reach. The most temperate are sometimes oppressed with sickness and pain. The diligent are often involved in poverty. The meek, the peaceful and generous friends of mankind are sometimes exposed to unjust reproaches, to injurious persecutions, and death itself *for righteousness sake*. But in these distressing circumstances, undissembled goodness has its present effects. *The fruit of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever. God will keep the man in perfect peace whose mind is stay'd upon him*. The Apostles of our Lord underwent the severest trials, the most cruel mockings and persecutions ; and nevertheless they could say, *we are troubled on every side, yet not distressed ; we are perplexed, but not in despair ; persecuted, but not forsaken ; cast down, but not destroyed*. They even *gloried in tribulations*. Amidst all their sufferings it was their rejoicing, the testimony of their conscience, that *in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, or according to the corrupt maxims of the world, but according to the grace of God* they had their conversation. Though true religion cannot

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always preserve men out of trouble in the present imperfect state, it never fails to carry them honourably through it. It inspires the mind under its sacred influence with a sense of the divine favour, with the assured hopes of a glorious resurrection, and life eternal in the heavens. *I am now ready to be offered up*, says Paul, *I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge will give to me in that day; and not to me only, but to all them that love his appearance.*

With much greater certainty is obedience to the divine will calculated to render us happy in the heavenly world; where there shall be no more sickness nor pain, nor any more death; where the wicked shall cease from troubling the righteous. The natural notion all men entertain of heaven is, that it is a state of perfect, never ending happiness. And what makes it so but the exercise of good affections, with the blissful and exalted society that surrounds the throne of God? there every one keeps all the divine commandments always; and therefore it is well with them for ever. There every one loves the Lord with all his heart, and his neighbour as himself. This renders it the delightful region of peace, harmony, truth and righteousness.

Is it not evident then, that, as virtue has a natural tendency to produce happiness where-ever it prevails, and God has enjoined the practice of it upon *all* men, he therefore desires sincerely that *all* may be happy?

By how many other considerations might this comfortable truth be confirmed? Is not the *goodness* of God every where displayed? does not one generation declare it to another? is not all nature expressive of his inclination to communicate some degree of happiness to every living creature according to their different capacities? let us look around. The earth affords a convenient habitation for man and beast. The ocean supplies us with clouds and rain, with rivers and fountains of water. The air we breathe in is a medium for the conveyance of light, the beauty of colours and the harmony of sounds. The sun, moon and stars, that roll incessant thro' the azure sky, are appointed to diffuse light, warmth and life thro' the animal and vegetable world. Who can doubt of his goodness that has furnished this world with so much happiness as to satisfy the natural desires of every living thing?

As a farther proof of his benevolent intentions to the human race,

race, let it be considered, that God is the universal King, and men are his subjects. *He hath established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom ruleth over all.* But what would you think of a sovereign, who would pay no regard to the happiness of his subjects? who would be partial to a few, and entertain evil designs against the greater part of them? would you not think him unworthy of his dignity, unworthy of your esteem? certainly you would. Kings are called Gods in scripture, because they are invested with supreme authority, and should employ it in making all their subjects happy, as far as their own conduct will permit, without introducing greater disorder and wretchedness.

But our God stands in a relation to every one of us still more endearing than that of a king. *Have we not all one FATHER, who hath not one God created us?* but it is impossible to separate love and good-will from the notion of a father. Is it not the desire of every parent, that *all* his children may be happy? If this be the case with men, how much more with the best of beings. Since the father of the spirits of all flesh has given this good protection to others, he surely must possess it himself; and that to the highest degree. The declarations of God to the Jews, church of old, may be justly adopted by *all* Christians, who are members of the same church enlarged. But we are informed by *Isai. xlix. 14.* that *Zion said, the Lord hath forsaken me, and the Lord hath forgotten me.* And how does God remove this desponding complaint? by appealing to the most tender feelings of their own hearts, and declaring that his love to them was still strong. *Can a mother forget her sucking child — ? they may forget. Shall a monster may possibly be found. Yet will I not forget thee.* Should we unite the kindest affections of the whole human race in the same person, they would come vastly short of the love of God to all the children of men. *There is none good but one, and that is God.* His goodness is so perfect, unmixed and extensive, that the best dispositions of any creature hardly deserve to be compared with it. No friend here below delights in our virtue, or wishes our happiness with more sincerity. Upon what solid principles may the whole earth rejoice! and what striking display of this diffusive good-will have mankind received! sure, the most wondrous of all the divine works or ways will here occur to every grateful mind, the appearance of Jesus Christ among men to lead us to virtue and glory. *God so loved the world, that he sent his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him*

might not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his son into the world, to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. Can any of us call in question his friendly intentions, *who spared not his own son, but gave him up to the death for us all?* especially, when we are assured, 2 Pet. iii. 9, that he is *long suffering to us-ward, not willing that ANY should perish, but that ALL should come to repentance?* What stronger language could be used to express the divine benevolence to every one of us? none perhaps but the pointed enquiry we have, Ezek. xviii. 23. *have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord, and not that he should return from his ways and live?* with the solemn answer given to this, ch. xxxiii. 11, *as I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.* Must we not be faithless and perverse mortals if we don't depend upon the sincerity of these declarations from the God of truth? are they not perfectly agreeable to the diffusive goodness of his nature?—cruelty and ill-will are such detestable qualities, that none can ascribe them to the father of mercies without the highest impiety. We look with horror upon the man who designs the misery of his fellow creatures. And how could our hearts be reconciled to the God and father of all, unless we were sure that he wishes us well? that his goodness is limited by nothing but his wisdom? which is only the standard of communicating happiness to all, who, by a patient continuance in well-doing, are prepared for the enjoyment of glory, honour and immortality.

When we duly consider these arguments, proving that God sincerely desires all men may be virtuous and happy, must we not conclude, that the obscure passages of scripture alledged in opposition to this, are perverted from their genuine sense? but more of this afterwards. In the mean time, let us attend to the most obvious consequences of what has been suggested. Since God in earnest desires that *all* men may live in the practice of piety and virtue, and has furnished them *all* with every mean necessary for this end, it follows, that he has *no* share in men's guilt, nor *any* hand in their crimes. But *shall there be evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?* Amos, iii. 6. That is, shall war, famine, or any other calamity befall a city, but under the governing providence of God?—this sense the word *evil* often bears in scripture, as in Isai. xlv. 7. *I make peace and create evil*, that is, *war*, in opposition to *peace*. Neither *can* it have any other meaning here. Will any dare to speak it out, that *the Lord hath done sin?*

In

In the Epistle of Jude also there is a passage that, in our translation, favours the notion of God's having a hand in men's crimes. It is there said of *ungodly men, turning the grace of God into wickedness*, that they were *before of old ordained to this condemnation*, verse 4th. The translators of the Bible have in many places offered the utmost violence to the original, in order to make it speak their own sense ; but rarely in a more remarkable manner than here. It is impossible to observe such unfair treatment of this book from heaven without some degree of indignation. Every school-boy may see, that the literal English of the words rendered, *before of old ordained*, is, *formerly written of* ; and this, it is obvious, must refer to the writings of the Prophets, where the characters of such men are foretold. But God may foresee what men of wicked dispositions will do without having any influence upon their conduct. And, for their own reformation, he may foretell what will happen in case of disobedience, as he did to Pharaoh : or future events may be revealed to instruct his servants what part to act ; which seems to be the design of the place referred to in Jude, and a plain instance of which we have, 1 Sam. xxiii. 11, 12, 13.

But, it may be asked, *who bath resisted his will*, or desire ? not one, in a certain sense. When God wills to make different orders of creatures with higher and lower capacities, or to confer great advantages upon one nation or person above another ; in these cases none resists his will. But in the use of his gifts all wicked men are chargeable with this. In scripture they are represented as *the enemies of the Lord*. Ps. xxxvii. 20. and as *striving with their maker*, Isai. xlv. 9, because they counteract his designs. This manner of speaking runs so commonly thro' the Bible, that there is no shift to elude it, but this wretched one, worse than silence ; that God has one *secret*, and an opposite *revealed* will : that tho' the wicked and ungodly act against his revealed, yet they are fulfilling his secret will : in plain English, that he intends only to deceive his reasonable offspring by the Revelation he has given them ! what would you think of the *truth* of a father, who would declare solemnly to his children, that he wished the happiness of them *all*, while, in the mean time he designed to make a part of them miserable ? and this independent of, or prior to their own actions ? Would you not esteem him a vile hypocrite ? may we be delivered from such unworthy thoughts of the divine conduct !

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The arguments brought from Philosophy, to prove that wicked men do not resist the divine will, are in appearance much stronger. They are in truth more perplexing to a mind not accustomed to philosophical disquisitions. The advocates for this scheme talk much of the sovereignty and independency of God, and alledge that a power in any creature to resist his will, would be an infringement upon these attributes : from whence they infer, that the person who betrays his friend, murders the innocent, &c. is doing the will of God, and by no means blameable. Whether this be Calvinism or Atheism, is left to the determination of others. This much must be clear to every one, that it opposes the sense of right and wrong which is wrought into our nature, and leaves us without a righteous Governor, without a Governor who makes any distinction between virtue and vice. Some are of opinion, that the Gentlemen who espouse this scheme, to make it good, should prove, that God has never made a rational creature capable of choosing or acting. This would give him the most unlimited independency. But if what every one feels is granted, that man is a free creature*, that is, a creature capable of deliberating, of choosing and of acting in consequence of his deliberate choice, the difficulty is, in a great measure, removed. It then appears, that such a creature from his very frame may

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abuse

* It is not affirmed above that the will is free, tho' this be an Arminian tenet. No ; in whatever pompous language Philosophers or Divines may speak of the will, as a faculty of the soul invested with supreme dominion, it may perhaps appear, after a careful attention to our own feelings, that the will is only a determination of the soul, a result of its operations.---*I will, or I will not*---that is, *I am resolved or not* : I, the person, the thinking being, am determined to *act or not*. But this determination of the mind we constantly feel proceeding from some cause. We never determine for or against any thing without some motive. In other words, the will is always governed, either by reason and conscience on the one hand, or by appetite and passion on the other. When the former principles prevail, we act virtuously ; we enjoy the highest freedom of which we have any conceptions, the freedom of Angels, the glorious liberty of the children of God. Hence says Christ to his disciples, *ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you FREE*. And again, *if the son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed*. When passion runs away with us, in opposition to the dictates of reason, we are guilty of vice, and so far enslaved. But tho' the will is governed in both these cases, man is yet naturally a free creature.

And his freedom consists in a power to bring all his passions, humours and fancies to the bar of reason and conscience, and there to cherish or reject their suggestions as seemeth good to the supreme judge. Should it be said, that this cannot be done without some motive, it will be easily admitted. But is not a regard to our own happiness a powerful spring of action ? is it not equally evident, that this can only be promoted by the practice of universal righteousness ? and is not this a sufficient motive to make us put off the indulgence of any desire, until we have considered whether it be, upon the whole, conducive to our happiness ? it need not become the subject of dispute, whether we possess this capacity of deliberating and suspending action from a regard to our own advantage. It is a matter of experience ; a sober attention to which will be more instructive than all the hard words of wrangling Divines, or conceited Philosophers, who, by straining Christianity in order to make it coincide with their science, falsely so called, did early and most astonishingly pervert and obscure the scripture doctrine of Election ; which, in itself, and separated from human schemes, is perfectly consistent with all the moral attributes of God, and clear to the weakest understanding. The truth of this, I hope, will appear immediately when the plain, scriptural account of it is laid before you.

abuse his capacities, may choose wrong, without taking any thing from the independency of God, who gave him this frame, and knew the final issue of all things, with the benefits that, under his administration, would arise from human mistakes. For whatever invasions the enemies of God may make upon his kingdom, yet the great plan will never be overthrown. He may deprive wicked men or devils of their existence sooner than infringe upon the exercise of liberty, which is natural to them while they continue in being. Infinite power and wisdom can never want the means of doing what is fit. Notwithstanding all the vices of any intelligent creature, the independency of God is secure and inviolable. The sentiment implied in the words of Elihu, Job, xxxv. 6, is agreeable to sound philosophy, *if thou sinnest, what dost thou against him? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what dost thou unto him?* Our wickedness may hurt ourselves but cannot injure God, nor break in upon the final order of his government. On the contrary, so inexhaustible is his wisdom, that when men resist his will and violate his laws, he frequently turns their vices to the advantage and improvement of his creatures.

Our frame therefore exposeth us to the danger of resisting the will of God: and this, quite consistent with his independency.

It is still evident then, notwithstanding these objections, that since it is the will of God *all* men should be virtuous, he has no share in their guilt or vices. How unjust the assertion then, that 'God has fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass'! don't we observe sin frequently *coming to pass*? and has he fore-ordained this, while yet he is not willing it should be committed? can such fickleness or dissimulation be seriously ascribed to the unchangeable God! Hence we may also learn how groundless the best apology is that ever has been made for sin, frequently found in the mouths of the common people, which indeed they have taken from Divines. How usual is it with many, speaking of the most enormous crimes which they or their friends have been guilty of, to say, poor creatures! it was their appointed fate, and they could not break thro' it, or something to this purpose! Such amazing speeches are well exposed by Homer in Mr. Pope's translation of that old Poet:

*Perverse Mankind, whose minds created free,
Charge all their woes on absolute decree!
All to the dooming Gods their guilt translate;
And follies are miscall'd the crimes of fate.*

Could

Could the most abandoned criminal, the betrayer of his country, or the murderer of his parents, believe this, he might indeed be quite easy. But fortunately, the principles of our nature in favour of virtue are stubborn, and will not readily bend to such opinions. For such persons, notwithstanding all their talk and endeavours to the contrary, yet cannot help blaming themselves upon doing what they see to be wrong. And what are these feelings of the heart, but dismal forebodings, that their imaginations will not stand in judgment? that every mouth will then be stopped?

Besides this, it has been also proved, that God sincerely desires the happiness of *all* men. From whence it directly follows, that he has no part in the damnation of any. Men are the authors of their own crimes, and their crimes are the only cause of their destruction. *O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself*, says God to the Jewish nation, Hol. xiii. 9. *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem*, says Christ in the most tender strains, *how often would I have gathered thy children together even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not*. Matth. xxiii. 37. And again, *ye will not come to me, that ye might have life*, John v. 40. But here the mind wedded to the doctrine of the Westminster and other orthodox Divines, will be ready to enquire, how these things can be? for if God 'has elected some only to everlasting life; and fore-ordained others to everlasting death,' how can he be said to desire the happiness of *all*? doubtless, upon this supposition, in the common meaning of the words, no such thing could be affirmed. But let us attend to the light which the sacred writings afford upon this subject, greatly darkened and perplexed by the mixtures and inventions of men.

In the history of the Bible we are informed, that not long after the flood, the descendants of Noah had generally fallen into idolatry and disobedience: to reclaim them from which God was pleased in his infinite wisdom to *choose* Abraham, to call him from among the rest, to make extraordinary discoveries to him, and to promise that a nation proceeding from him should enjoy many advantages above others. This was accordingly accomplished. That branch of his family, which God intended to raise to such high dignity, not only grew into a flourishing nation under the peculiar guardianship of heaven, but long continued as a pattern to all the earth of obedience and reward, or of transgression and punishment. Upon this account, God is every
where

where said to have *chosen* this people. For instance, Deut. vii. 6, *the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people to himself above all people that are upon the face of the earth.* Agreeable to this we find the Jews in general called his *chosen* or *elect*. 1 Chron. xvi. 13, *O ye seed of Israel his servant, ye children of Jacob his chosen ones.* And in this national privilege David justly rejoices, Psal. xxxiii. 12, *blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, and the people whom he hath chosen for his inheritance.* And upon this principle we hear him addressing God, Psal. cvi. 4, 5;—*visit me with thy salvation, that I may see the good of thy CHOSEN or elect, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy NATION.* In Ezekiel also the same manner of speaking is used, ch. xx. 5, *thus saith the Lord, in the day when I chose Israel—the seed of the house of Jacob, and made myself known to them in the land of Egypt.*

At the same time, God takes care to inform the Jews, that notwithstanding the greater privileges they enjoyed, yet their fellow-creatures were not abandoned by him. Deut. x. 14, 15, *behold the heaven—is the Lord's thy God, the earth also, and ALL that therein is. Only the Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people; and in the 17th and 18th verses, he tells them, that he regardeth not persons, but loveth the stranger: that is, the heathen, so called, because they were strangers among the Jews.*

But what deserves particular notice is, that in every one of these places God is said to have elected or chosen *all* the Israelites considered as a *nation* or *people*, whether the individuals were obedient or rebellious. Nothing can be more evident therefore, than that their election signified their being taken into the peculiar church of God from the idolatry prevailing around them, and had no relation to their final state of happiness or misery.

Now, as the Christian scheme is the Jewish Oeconomy enlarged to receive all nations, agreeable to the original promise made to Abraham, so the same phrases are used to express our rank and dignity. As all, who believe in their hearts and profess with their mouths that Jesus is the Lord, are taken from that gross ignorance and idolatry in which the heathens are involved, so they are *all* said in the language of the New Testament to be *chosen* or *elect*. For instance, Matth. xx. 16, our Lord, having shown from the parable of the labourers brought into the vineyard at different periods, that the Gentiles, tho' living long under the meer light of nature, were at that time to be re-

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ceived into his church, concludes in these words, *so the last shall be first*, 'the Gentiles, who were inferior to the Israelites in privileges, shall now be raised above the unbelieving Jews'; *for many be called*, 'all the Jews as well as other nations are invited,' *but few are chosen*. 'They only are taken into the Christian Church who believe in the son of God.'

Rom. viii. 33, *who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?* that is, of any Christian?

In the beginning of the Epistle to the Ephesians, the Apostle, having saluted the *saints of Ephesus and the faithful in Christ Jesus*, that is, all Christians there, thanks God who had blessed them *with all spiritual blessings*. And then he proceeds to inform them in the 4th verse, that these gospel-blessings were not accidental, but designed before the world was made to be conferred upon them in that period, being the fittest time in the estimate of unerring wisdom; *according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we might be holy and without blame before him in love*.

Coloss. iii. 12, the same Apostle addressing himself to Christians in general, says, *put on therefore, as the elect of God, bowels of mercy, &c.* But tho' these persons were all *elect*, yet he reminds them in the 25th verse, *he that doth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done, and there is no respect of persons*.

In the same style he speaks to the Thessalonians, 2 Eph. ch. ii. 13, *but we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because he hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, thro' sanctification of the spirit, and belief of the truth*. They are here said without exception to be the *beloved of the Lord*, and *chosen*. But perhaps it may be thought, there is something more meant of these Christians than their admission to the advantages of the gospel, because it is said, they were *chosen to salvation*. And doubtless this is the end of all spiritual blessings. We are all *elect* or taken into the kingdom of Christ here below, in order to obtain everlasting happiness. Certainly God does not intend to mock any of us by offering, or to cheat us by promising what he does not mean to make good on his part.

In the same sense this word is used, Ti. i. 1, *Paul a servant of God*,—*according to the faith of God's elect*: that is, the common faith of Christians. And 2 Tim. ii. 10, *I endure all things for the elect's sake*, for the sake of Christians, *that they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory*. Where it is evidently supposed that it was possible these *elect* persons might not obtain salvation and eternal glory.

Peter

Peter also uses the same language, 1 Ep. Ch. i. 1, 2, *Peter an Apostle to the strangers—elect according to the fore knowledge of the father*: that is, 'taken into the Church of Christ at a time which God knew to be most fit.' And in the same Epistle he speaks still more plainly of the *whole body* of Christians as *elected*, and applies other phrases to them which had been formerly peculiar to the Jews, Ch. ii. 9, *but ye are a chosen generation,—an holy nation, &c. that ye might show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness*, their former state of ignorance, *into his marvellous light*. But the word *chosen* or *elected* no where bears this sense more evidently than in the 5th and 13th of the same letter, *the church at Babylon elected together with you saluteth you. The church elected together with you*, that is, the Christian society to which the Gospel was preached, and which embraced Christianity at the same time with you.

Upon this sentiment Peter founds an exhortation to Christians 2 Ep. Ch. i. 10, *wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure*. That they were called or invited to the belief of the gospel, and that, after embracing this invitation, they were *elected*, *chosen*, or received into the Christian church, he takes for granted, and then exhorts them to a suitable improvement of this happy situation. *If ye do—*, says he, *ye shall never fall*: which was informing them with sufficient plainness, that if they did not, they would fall from the favour of God, and the happiness connected with it, tho' they were called and elected. But considering that they were members of Christ's kingdom in this world, that they were elected without doubt, he assures them, for their comfort and encouragement, that in doing these things which he had recommended, *an entrance would be ministered to them abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of Jesus Christ*.

The word *elect* or *chosen* does also signify to be appointed to some office or employment. Acts ix. 15, the historian, speaking of Paul, relates, that *the Lord said he is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before the Gentiles, and the kings, and the children of Israel*. Accordingly, the Apostle himself, tho' fully assured of the divine goodness and readiness to assist him, was yet very sensible, that thro' inattention or the force of passion, he might fall short of the christian character, and thereby deprive himself of life eternal. 1 Cor. ix. 27, *but I bring under my body, and keep it in subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself might be a cast-away*.

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But tho' this be the general acceptation of the word *elect* or *chosen*, yet it is often used to express the persons possessed of a christian temper and course of action, the genuine effect of Gospel blessings. Matth. xxiv. 22, *but for the elect's sake, these days shall be shortened*: that is, for the sake of the righteous who hearken to the voice of God, fewer calamities shall befall the Jews at the destruction of their metropolis: and in the 24th verse, we are told, *there shall arise false Christs, and false Propbets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch that if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect*: that is, their pretensions will be so plausible, and supported with so much art and cunning, that, if it were possible, they shall deceive even wise and good men, who, by a right improvement of the divine gifts, make their election sure.*

Mark xiii. 27, *then shall he send his angels and shall gather his ELECT from the four winds*: that is, the righteous.

Luke xviii. 7, *and shall not God avenge his own ELECT?* 'shall he suffer the injuries done his faithful servants to pass unpunished?'

* It will perhaps be asked, may not a wise and good man be deceived? certainly he may, in many particulars that will interrupt his joy and comfort in passing thro' this world; but not in what is necessary to the practice of virtue and the attainment of eternal life. These are our Saviour's own words, John vii. 17, *if any man be disposed to do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself*. A truly good man is from his own temper in the fittest disposition to distinguish between truth and error, between what is worthy of God, and what is dishonourable to him. He has a standard within himself; he feels what goodness is. Upon this account David tells us, Ps. xxv. 14, *the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him*. For this reason, goodness of heart and life is a better security against dangerous mistakes in religion, than the highest intellectual attainments in company with corrupt dispositions. Every one must be sensible, that the humble, peaceful and friendly spirit, which is the proper effect of our election to the blessings of Christianity, is much better disposed to receive truth and knowledge, than the contrary, proud, imperious turn of mind. *Seest thou a man that is wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him*. Why? he apprehends himself wise enough already, and is therefore above receiving instruction from his fellow-creatures, and can have no just expectations of it from heaven: for *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble*.--- That elevation of mind above the world, which is the result of the knowledge of Jesus, is better prepared to receive the truth, and to adhere to it firmly under the greatest discouragements, than a covetous, vain or voluptuous temper. The immoderate love of this world is the root of all evil, which, while some have coveted after, they hath erred from the faith once delivered to the saints. Were men's hearts even as good as their understandings, their religion would generally bear a greater resemblance to truth and common sense. But without insisting upon this, let it only be observed, that an attention to Matth. xxiv. 24, casts great light upon a passage in the Acts, chap. xiii. 48, --- *and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed*. The original word here translated, *ordained*, signifies to be in order, or in a fit disposition for any thing that is spoken of. Any plain word, instead of the obscure one, *ordained*, would render it more intelligible to an English reader. *As many as were disposed for eternal life believed*; 'As many of these Gentiles as were lovers of truth and virtue, readily embraced the Apostles doctrine.' Having done the will of God in their several relations before that time, their discerning was clear to perceive the excellence of the doctrine proposed to them. They were thinking, virtuous men; and therefore it was not possible, it was extremely hard, to deceive them: while the common herd, sunk in ignorance by neglecting to cultivate their understandings, or engaged in vicious pursuits, were neither prepared to attend to the evidence of the truth, nor to endure the various hardships they must have encountered in professing it. The good Cornelius was the first convert to Christianity from the Gentile world. This character of the believing Gentiles may be farther illustrated by comparing it with that of the unbelieving Jews in the 46th verse, to which it is opposed, that *they put the word of God from them, and judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life*.

and Matth. xxii. 14, the word *chosen* seems from the preceding parable to be confined to the *virtuous* professors of Christianity, who are at last taken into the heavenly kingdom.

In this sense, any one may see, the Westminster Divines use the word *elected* in the last Chapter of their Confession : and if this be what they mean when they tell us, that God has elected some to everlasting life, *viz.* that he has prepared this happiness for the righteous, the opinion seems to be unexceptionable. Matth. xx. 20, &c. we are informed, that the mother of Zebedee's children came to our Saviour with a very ambitious request, that her two sons might be raised to the highest dignity in his kingdom, which she vainly dreamt, was of this world. After gentle endeavours to make her desist, he tells her plainly, verse 23, *to sit on my right hand and on my left is not mine to give* ; ' I can't be partial by conferring the most exalted rank in my kingdom upon any from caprice or humour : ' *but to whom it is prepared of my father* ; ' Nor can I break thro' the established laws of unerring wisdom which has appointed what you desire only to persons of a *certain character*, without which your sons cannot obtain it.' In the 26 and 27th verses he hints at the nature of the highest distinction among his disciples, *whoever will be great among you*, let him be your *minister* or assistant : *and whoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant*. But in the xxv. Ch. from the 34th verse we have no room left to doubt of the persons for *whom the kingdom is prepared*. The judge of all, giving an account of the procedure at the last day, observes, that *the King shall say to them on his right hand, come, ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world*. But who are they for whom the kingdom is prepared ? this we have explained in the next verses, *I was an hungred, and YE gave me meat, &c.* Here we are assured, that the kingdom is prepared of the father for persons of a benevolent character : and lest this should be understood as separated from the other parts of a virtuous conduct, we have in conclusion a general phrase comprehensive of every good quality. *The RIGHTEOUS shall go away into life eternal*. But it has been already proved, that God sincerely desires all men may be *righteous*, and furnishes them *all* with every thing necessary to improve them in virtue ; and therefore, if any of us fall short of *the kingdom prepared for the righteous*, it is wholly our own fault. We have none to blame but ourselves.

Thus, all who embrace the Gospel are *elected* to the blessings therein

therein contained : to the joyous light, the precious promises and glorious hopes that are there set before us : and they, who, under the influence of these blessings, have their fruit unto holiness, shall in the end obtain everlasting life.

Well may God address the members of the Christian Church as he did the Jews, *Isai. v. 3, 4, and now, O inhabitants of the Christian world, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it ?* has he not given his Son *to be the head over all things to the CHURCH ?* has not Jesus Christ shown us *all* what is good, and what the Lord requires of us ? has he not set life and death before us *all*, with his own example for our imitation, and the strongest assurances of the divine assistance for our encouragement ? has he not *tasted death for every man ?* is he not a *propitiation*, or mercy-seat, *for the sins of the whole world ?* this the scriptures of truth assert most expressly, and in a great variety of language. Nay, they speak of it as a thing possible, that one *for whom Christ died, may perish*, 1 Cor. viii. 11, or *may be destroyed*, Rom. xiv. 15. And why should this be thought incredible ? nothing can make it appear unworthy of belief, but unscriptural and unreasonable apprehensions of the design of the death of Christ. In this and many other cases, people take their preconceived opinions for granted, and then renounce the most evident truths that are inconsistent with them.

In the first Epistle of John, Ch. iii. 16, we are clearly instructed in what sense Christ died for men. *He laid down his life FOR US : and we ought to lay down our lives FOR THE BRETHREN*, whenever it is necessary *for their good*, or to promote their happiness. But how commonly do men, thro' folly and ingratitude, abuse the highest instances of friendship in their benefactors, even if they should lay down their lives for their advantage. Is not this the manner in which thoughtless and wicked men slight and abuse the love of Christ, their kindest friend and most generous benefactor ? he died for their benefit ; but, ungrateful and foolish mortals ! *they will not come to him*, by complying with his instructions, and following his example, *that they may have life*.

It is objected, that if Christ died for those who *perish*, then he died *in vain*. But it is easier to assert, than to prove this. — However men may despise his obedience unto death, and reap no benefit from it, yet he by no means died in vain. No ; he

did the will of him that sent him ; he ratified the covenant or dispensation of grace. Being made perfect thro' sufferings, he entered into glory proportioned to his high obedience, and now has the government of the Christian world upon his shoulders, that he may give reward to all his servants both small and great. And are these purposes *vain* or insignificant ?

If it should be urg'd, that, with regard to those who shall perish by their own wickedness, the life or death of Christ is in vain, I shall not pretend to deny it. What absurdity is in this ? is it any more than what the Messiah himself laments, *Isai. xlix, 4 ? I have laboured in vain, says he, I have spent my strength for nought,* speaking, no doubt, of those who despise and reject him, but not insinuating, that his undertaking would be fruitless or in vain. No ; for he adds, *yet surely my judgment is with the Lord. and my work with my God.* And in the next verse he declares still more expressly, *tho' Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength.*

It is farther said, that since Christ did not pray for *all* men, he could not die for them. And indeed if the one were true, it would be a strong presumption in favour of the other. If he had not wished all men well, he certainly would not have died for their good. But let us turn to the place from whence the objection is taken : *Joh. xvii. 9, I pray for them : I pray not for the world, but for them thou hast given me out of the world.* Now, for whom was Jesus praying upon this occasion ? was it not for the Apostles alone ? *I pray for them :* for the men of whom he was speaking in the 6th verse, the men to whom he had already manifested the name of God, and who had already kept the divine word. But to put the matter beyond dispute, he says, verse 12th, *those that thou gavest me, I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition.* Since one of the persons here said to be given him out of the world was lost, the phrase must be confined to the Apostles, for whom he is particularly praying in the 9th verse. They were about to be exposed to a severe tryal, and required all the consolation which he administred, and the peculiar assistance which he entreated for them upon this mournful occasion. He therefore in the first place prays for them, in the eastern phraseology, without intending to exclude the rest of the world from a part in his supplications. The same form of expression, *Hos. vi. 6, I desired mercy, and not sacrifice,* is not designed to deny, that God commanded sacrifices to be offer'd ;

but

but only to inform us, that he desired mercy rather than sacrifice. In the same style our Lord speaks, *I pray not for the world, but for them thou hast given me out of the world* : ' Rather than for the rest of the world, I now pray for my Apostles.' Accordingly, he declares in the 20th verse, *neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me thro' their word* ; for all Christians to the end of the world. Nay, he afterwards extends his earnest prayers beyond those who shall believe in him, to Deists, Jews and Pagans. He prays for love and harmony among his disciples, in order to recommend Christianity to the rest of the world. *May they all be one, that the WORLD may know and believe that thou hast sent me.* So extensive was the charity, so unlimited the good-will of Jesus to all mankind, agreeable to his commission, John xvii. 2, *thou hast given him power over ALL FLESH, that he should give eternal life to AS MANY as thou hast given him* ; that is, to all flesh. How weak and groundless then is the argument brought from any thing in this chapter to show, that Christ did not die for all men !

The consequences of this opinion are shocking to the last degree. Is it not the duty of every person in the Christian world to believe, that Christ died for him in particular ? this, I apprehend, none will venture to deny. But can God enjoin it upon men to believe what must be a lye in many instances, if Christ died only for a part of them ? besides, we are assured, Heb. x. 29, that they, who *have trodden under foot the son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith they should be sanctified, an unboly thing, shall, upon this account, be thought worthy of the sorer punishment.* But if there was no possibility, that these wicked persons could have received benefit from the death of Christ, can any thing be conceived more absurd than that this should aggravate their punishment ? nothing certainly could be more inconsistent with equity or goodness. From whence it follows, that they might have been happy by a due improvement of his death.

Is it necessary to mention any other objections against the kind intentions of heaven to all men ? there are yet a few passages of scripture brought in opposition to this, which deserve to be considered. Prov. xvi. 4, it is said *the Lord hath made all things for himself* : yea, even the wicked for the day of evil. But let it be observed, that the two clauses of this verse are quite independent of each other. In the first, the author asserts God's absolute au-
thority

thority over all things. In the next, he affirms in a concise style, that even the wicked will be fitly disposed of, will be consigned to evil, the only thing they are capable of. This is more largely expressed, Job xxi. 30, where we are told, *that the wicked is reserved to the day of destruction, they shall be brought forth to the day of wrath.* And that the latter part of Prov. xvi. 4, can signify no more, is evident from the next verse, where the same thought is more clearly expressed, *every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord : though hand join in hand he shall not be unpunished.* But can any rational creature believe, that God makes men proud, and then abominates and punishes them for it withal.

The only place in the Bible besides this, worth notice, alledged to prove, that God does not entertain benevolent designs towards all men, is the ninth Chapter of the Epistle to the Rom. several expressions of which have been taken in this sense. Let us turn to this, that we may see what light it casts upon the subject.*

The Apostle's solemn declaration of good-will to his countrymen, in the beginning of this chapter, even to the wishing himself excluded from visible communion with the members of Christ's body, shows, that he intends not to gratify any malicious humour, but to vindicate the justice and goodness of God, in excluding this nation or people from his church for their unbelief, and to make them receive with thankfulness the grace that was offered to them. This is farther evident from his mentioning those peculiar privileges which they formerly enjoyed as the people of God considered in a national capacity. In the 6th verse, he comes to answer an objection which the Jews would urge against the possibility of their being cast off : viz. that in this case the word of God would be without effect. This word of God, to which they referred and greatly misunderstood, is Gen. xvii. 7, *I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant ; to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee.* And their objection the Apostle removes by showing the meaning of this promise

* Suffer me here to recommend it to you to open your bibles and consult with leisure and attention every passage here referred to, as well as its connection with what goes before and follows. Without this it is impossible to understand, with any degree of precision, what is obscure. And tho' it is extremely obvious, that if we would enter into the spirit of any writer, we must attend to his own words and manner of arranging things, yet it frequently happens, either thro' indolence or some unmeaning curiosity, that people hurry on to read interpretations of scripture, without sufficiently considering the sacred text, or perhaps without looking into it. And trifling as this circumstance may appear, yet it is probably one reason why absurd interpretations of scripture are easily admitted. Nothing indeed can be better calculated to suffer interpreters to put their own colours upon every thing, and to throw dust into the eyes of their readers.

mise from their own history. There they might have learned, that they are not all Jews who descended from that family which God chose to be the heads of this nation. Neither because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children ; or entitled to the singular advantages of this family ; for Abraham had several sons, and Ishmael in particular, in whom he *willed* that the promise might be accomplished. This, however, was not the intention nor promise of God : *but in Isaac shall thy seed be called*, Gen. xxi. 12. This explication of the extent of the promise he farther confirms, by reminding them, that when Rebecca had conceived by their father Isaac, it was said unto her, *the elder shall serve the younger*. And this distinction, he argues in the 11th verse, was wholly owing to the sovereign purpose of God : for when it was made, the children were *unborn*, and had neither *done good* to engage his regard, nor *evil* to incur his displeasure. It was, *that the purpose of God, according to election,* might stand, not of*

* That the purpose of God, according to election, relates to the national advantages which the descendants of Jacob enjoyed above the offspring of Esau, agreeable to the idea already given of the scripture-doctrine of election, is evident from the single verse of which the Apostle quotes only a part. Gen. xxv. 23. *And the Lord said unto her, two NATIONS are in thy womb, and two manner of PEOPLE shall be separated from thy bowels, and the one PEOPLE shall be stronger than the other PEOPLE, and the ELDER shall serve the YOUNGER*. He then observes, that God had also declared by the Prophet Malachi, *Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated*. From which two passages compared, it appears, that his electing love to Jacob consisted in the national blessings conferred upon the Jews ; and his reprobating hatred to Esau may signify his not taking the posterity of Esau into so near a relation, but allowing them to live under the common light of nature, in a state no worse, whatever it was better, than if the Jews had been in the same condition.

If St. Paul meant, that God hated Esau before he had done good or evil, it is plain, that this was the whole extent of his hatred. But it may be doubted, whether this be the Apostle's real meaning. Is it not more probable, that the circumstance of the children's not being yet born, in the 11th verse, relates only to the purpose of God according to election mentioned there, but has nothing to do with the declaration in the 13th verse ? This, the Apostle tells us, is a quotation from some other place. He introduces it with these words, *as it is written, ' Jacob have I loved, ' &c.* For the meaning of this we must have recourse to the place it is taken from, Mal. i. 2, 3, 4. One cannot read this passage attentively, without seeing, that by Jacob and Esau, the Prophet understands the Israelites and Edomites in general. *I have loved you*, saith the Lord to Israel ; *yet ye say, wherein hast thou loved us*.-----Whereas Edom saith, *WE are impoverished, but WE will return and build again the desolate places*. Thus saith the Lord, *THEY shall build, but I will throw down*. And they shall call THEM the border of wickedness, and the PEOPLE against whom the Lord hath indignation forever. But why did God hate Esau, or the Edomites ? Why did he declare that he would demolish their buildings, and have indignation against them forever, to hinder them from becoming a powerful or flourishing nation again ? The reason of this is hinted along with these awful denunciations. Their general character is, that they were a border of wickedness. But the particular crime by which they forfeited the divine protection, and incurred his displeasure, is pointed out with the greatest precision in these passages of scripture. Obad. 8---11. *Shall I not in that day, saith the Lord, even destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of the mount of Esau ? and thy mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed, to the end that every one of the mount of Esau may be cut off by slaughter*. FOR THY VIOLENCE against thy brother Jacob, shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off forever. Ezek. xxv. 12---14. Thus saith the Lord, BECAUSE that Edom hath dealt against the house of Judah,-----THEREFORE---I will also stretch out mine hand upon Edom, and will cut off man and beast from it, and will make it desolate from Teman, and they of Dedan shall fall by the sword.

To

of works, for none of them had done any thing, *but of him that calleth*, of God alone who called Jacob to a high degree of dignity and happiness above Esau.

Our Apostle, having produced these instances to show, that his countrymen misunderstood the word or promise of God which they objected to him, and that, quite consistent with this, it was possible many of them might be unchurched, proceeds to consider some difficulties yet attending the matter. They would be ready to ask upon what he had said, *is their unrighteousness with God?* by no means, says he, and illustrates this, verse 15th, by another instance from their own history. The Lord said unto Moses, *Exod. xxxiii. 19. I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee, and will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.* The Jews at this time deserved to have been cut off for their idolatry; and yet God continued them in the relation of his chosen people. But to give Moses just notions of his conduct, he tells him, that in this he gave a display of the goodness of his nature: that his benefits did not flow from any claim they could have upon him, but from his own free grace to be exercised in whatever degree and upon whatever persons he saw proper. Instead of showing the Israelites mercy, he might have justly suffered them to go on in sin, till he would have discovered his wisdom in their destruction. This appears, he remarks in the 17th verse, from what God in scripture declares concerning his dealings with Pharaoh and the Egyptians: *that for this purpose he had raised him up*, had removed the boils and blains with which he was visited, *that he might show his power in him, and that his name might be declared thro' all the earth.* His long-suffering patience towards Pharaoh was very conspicuous in the many repeated calls he had to repentance. But when, trampling upon all this goodness, he had arrived at a pitch of wickedness,

To the same purpose, *Ezek. xxxv. 3-7. Thus saith the Lord, O Mount Seir, I run against thee, and I will make thee most desolate. I will lay thy cities waste, and thou shalt be desolate. And thou shalt know that I am the Lord, BECAUSE thou hast had a perpetual hatred, and hast shed the blood of the children of Israel by the sword, in the time of their calamity, in the time that their inquiry had an end. THEREFORE, as I live, saith the Lord, I shall prepare thee unto blood, and blood shall pursue thee.* Thus, God hated the Edomites for the injuries they had done to their brethren the Jews. For this cause he laid their mountains and their heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness. The election of Jacob, with his posterity, was an act of grace, of mere favour and bounty. The destruction of the Edomites was an act of justice for their great wickedness. This was probably his hatred to Esau. And if this be a scriptural account of the reasons why God hated Esau, that is, the Edomites, the advocates for the doctrine of the soul's predestination to hell, prior to its conduct, must go somewhere else for the proof of their comfortable opinion.

wickedness, of which God in his wisdom thought fit to express the strongest abhorrence, then the divine power was seen, in his overthrow, to be great and irresistible : and God was declared through all the earth to be a righteous judge. *

From these two instances, relating to the Israelites and Egyptians, St. Paul concludes, in the 18th verse, that God, according to his wisdom and in perfect righteousness, bestows his favours upon one part of Mankind, the Jews of old and the Gentiles at that time, while he suffers others, the Egyptians of old and the Jews at that time, to abuse his goodness, hardening themselves in sin, untill he brings upon them a most exemplary punishment.

From the beginning of this Chapter to the 14th verse, the Apostle considers men as having received different original gifts prior to their own conduct. This explains the extent of the promise to Abraham. But from the 15th verse downwards, it appears from the characters that are introduced, that he regards them as having abused the divine blessings, and therefore treated in a different manner, according to the different degrees in which they are guilty. And this comes up to what he had particularly in view, the case of the Jews who were about to be rejected because of their unbelief. But this, the Apostle knew, his kinsmen would be ready to lay hold upon. He had been bred in all the particularities of their scheme. He had conversed often with them, and was well acquainted with all their devices to elude the force of the truth. He knew, that upon intimating the intention of God to cast them off, they overlooking their own infidelity, the true cause of their rejection, would endeavour to fix this event upon the Almighty. Accordingly, he introduces this objection, verse 19, *thou wilt say unto me, why doth he yet find fault ? for who hath resisted his will ?* this he answers with an indignation which he labours to conceal, verse 20, *nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God ? shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus ?* what weakness did the Jews discover in charging their threatened calamities upon God, who is good and righteous, without reflecting upon themselves, how they had abused his grace, transgressed his laws, and

* It is said in scripture, that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. But that this cannot be understood in a strict, literal sense, is evident from what has been shown above, that God sincerely desires all men may be virtuous, and has no share in their crimes. Besides, we are told, that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. He was delivered from one plague after another, by the goodness of God ; which should have softened his heart, and led him to repentance : but was, by his own wicked choice, made the occasion of hardening him in disobedience. In this manner God bears with the evil and unthankful. He is long-suffering towards them, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

and despised and rejected his own son ! how justly might any of them have been ashamed to appear as the author of it ! the Apostle, however, does not insist upon the impropriety of this, but makes use of another argument.

God had *formed* the Jews into a nation by a series of the most extraordinary events ; and they had greatly corrupted themselves. Had he not an undoubted right then to dispose of them in the fittest manner ? to confirm this he appeals, verse 21, to the parable of the potter in one of their own prophets. In this God shows, that he may justly dispose of all nations, and of the Jews in particular, as seemeth good to his unerring wisdom ; even as the potter hath a right, out of the same lump of clay, to make *one vessel to honour, and another to dishonour*, compared with the former, that is, for a less honourable use, as his own skill may direct him ; Jer. xviii. 1—11, a passage that deserves to be considered with a religious care.

In the 22d verse, the Apostle speaks out, and enquires how it was unfit that persons of such a character as the Jews should be stripped of the honours and advantages they had long abused. * *What if God, willing to show his wrath, his righteous displeasure against sin, and to make his power known, in destroying their nation, temple and constitution, that all might see their rebellion against him to be the cause of their overthrow, hath endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction, hath forborne to inflict the destruction they had long deserved, and were fitted for by their wickedness, as in the case of Pharaoh ?*

And what if this method was observed with the farther view mentioned in the 23d verse, that *he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy which he hath before prepared unto glory*, that he might display in the clearest manner his rich and glorious goodness upon those he loves, already prepared by a suitable improvement of his blessings, for the honour of being his church and people, believing Jews and Gentiles whom he had invited and taken into the Christian church.

The extent of the divine grace to all nations gave great offence to the narrow-minded Jews, who were for engrossing it all to themselves. And therefore their refusing to receive the gospel upon this account, illustrated the grace of God, or made it known in a high degree.

This chapter then relates to God's dealings with nations, and the

* To the same purpose the Apostle Peter speaks of the Jews as appointed to be rejected for their unbelief. 1 Ep. chap. ii. 8.

the various blessings bestowed upon them. Whole nations, however, shall neither go to heaven nor hell in collective bodies : and therefore this place has no regard to men's future state of happiness or misery.

With respect to the different advantages conferred upon nations or particular persons, let it be considered that as men may bestow their favours in what manner they please, so, doubtless, God may do what he *will* with his own. His will, we are sure, is the result of his perfections. A good man can will nothing inconsistent with goodness, unless he departs from his character. But God is unchangeable. His will is ever under the direction of equity, wisdom and goodness. And of these perfections in the Deity we are in some measure judges. God himself in various instances appeals to his reasonable creatures concerning the *righteousness* of his conduct : which evidently supposes, that we are capable of perceiving this. We may indeed be mistaken in this matter, unless we proceed with the utmost caution. We may rashly imagine, for instance, that goodness would prompt God to confer the highest blessings upon every nation and creature. But where would this notion carry us ? if goodness cannot be exercised without imparting the highest happiness, should not God have formed all creatures *Angels*, and these of the highest rank ? this plausible conceit would destroy all inferior orders of beings, and consequently be inconsistent with the divine goodness ; which is exerted in communicating happiness in some degree to various ranks, without diminishing the number of the highest : nay, while all these ranks, from the lowest insect to the most exalted Angel, are probably subservient to each other's happiness. Vain mortals that we are to reply against God ! of his wisdom we are least of all competent judges, because we have not knowledge enough for this arduous task. It is but an inconsiderable part of the great plan that we are acquainted with. And what orders of creatures God may form, or in what circumstances he may place any of them, consistent with goodness, is a matter where wisdom alone is concerned. Here then we ought, with silent admiration, to acquiesce in the divine conduct. He has created different orders, angelic, human, and brutal : and his goodness is extended to them all according to the nature that is given them. He did not think it unworthy of himself to assign it as one reason for sparing Nineveh, that there were many cattle in it. And the same wisdom and goodness, which presided in forming

forming different ranks of creatures, have likewise disposed of the same orders in a very different manner. Among men, whole nations enjoy the transporting discoveries, the astonishing grace of the Gospel : while others have only the book of nature and the bible of conscience for their direction. Among Christians, some have clear understandings, with the best opportunities of improving them ; while others are dull of apprehension, or by the place of their nativity, &c. are involved in the most uncomfortable and hurtful mistakes. In temporal matters, some are born heirs to large estates, while others inherit nothing but poverty and rags. To settle these things is the sole province of wisdom.— This amazing variety in every respect is calculated to answer many valuable purposes which occur to every one, and more undoubtedly, which we are not wise enough to discern. But what should be principally attended to is, that God requires of every creature only in proportion to the gifts that are imparted, and the opportunities that are afforded. He does not expect the same service from an Angel and a brute ; nor the same knowledge and love of himself, or the same grateful obedience, from a Christian and a Heathen ; nor the same actions from the rich and the poor.— This being kept in view, the goodness and equity of God are preserved inviolable. This demonstrates, that all his creatures shall be happy in some degree as long as they exist, unless they render themselves miserable. Agreeable to this, St. Peter declares Acts x. 34, 35, that *God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation, he that feareth him and worked righteousness is accepted with him.*

From the whole, may it not be concluded upon the clearest evidence, that righteousness, equity, wisdom and goodness are enthroned above ? and that no decree ever has descended, or ever will proceed from the throne of the eternal mind, but what is fit and right for the general order and the greatest happiness of the whole creation ? *bles God, O my soul ! Let ALL lands make a joyful noise unto the Lord. Let them enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Let them be thankful to him and bless his name. For the Lord is GOOD : his MERCY is everlasting : his TRUTH endureth to all generations.*

Obj. In lecturing upon the 23d chapter of Matthew, about the 8th verse, where our Saviour says, *be not ye called Rabbi, for one is your master, and all ye are brethren,* he took an opportunity from these words of inveighing against all assuming priests and all human establishments of every kind, and collective bodies, in making articles of faith

And tho' it was a little out of his way, he could not pass the reformers and reformation without attacking them. He said there was little more done at the reformation than changing one Pope for another, that the Kings of England were as absolute Popes here as the Popes of Rome were to the Roman Catholics, that things continued in this situation during all the reigns of the Stuarts, but were somewhat altered for the better at the revolution; and as for the church of Scotland, it could not be defended, or words to that purpose. Now, it is easy to see what he means by all this. For if he can once lay aside the principles of our reformers, and other old orthodox Divines, he may freely publish and maintain his own favourite pernicious principles: which he wants to impose upon the congregation.

R. In every free constitution there is a charter, which, in framing particular laws, is always kept in view. When any thing is enacted by the members of such a community that infringes upon the charter, every wise man is alarmed. The constitution is evidently in danger. But if, by the influence of a corrupt faction, laws are made in direct opposition to the original charter, the constitution is so far destroyed. Then at least, every good man will exert himself to defend or recover his own liberty, and that of his fellow-citizens.

Now, Christianity is a constitution, the very soul of which is freedom. Wherever constraint begins, religion ends. But Jesus Christ was wise enough to know, that religious liberty could neither be preserved in the world, nor restored when lost in the vicissitude of human affairs, unless it were guarded by some fundamental maxim or declaration, to which his disciples might at any time have recourse; and this so strongly and clearly expressed, that it might not be perverted even by the slight and cunning of men lying in wait to deceive. Of this kind is the leading truth which he has laid before those who will or dare follow him, Matth. xxiii. 8, — *one is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren*. This he esteemed of such importance, that he has expressed it in other words to his followers, Matth. xx. 25, 26, *ye know, that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them; but it shall not be so among you*. To these instructions the primitive Christians paid the highest regard. This might be proved from many instances in the new Testament: nor does it appear from history, that there was any considerable violence offer'd to the doctrine of Christ in this particular for upwards of 300 years after

after his death. During this time the Apostles and their successors thought it a sufficient establishment of Christianity to convince the world of its truth, excellence and happy consequences, and to recommend it by the innocence and goodness of their own lives. In this period, however, when men did not set up for matters in Christ's school, but treated one another, like brethren, with love and mutual forbearance, the Christian religion made a most amazing progress thro' the different nations of the earth.* It quickly gained ground amidst the hottest flames of persecution, 'till, in the fourth century, Constantine, the Roman Emperor, engaged to examine this divine religion by the wonderful effects it produced upon others, was convinced of its truth, and became a convert. This greatly altered the situation of Christians.—Constantine had been accustomed to *exercise authority and dominion* in the Pagan religion : and this was too flattering a privilege to be given up. This power he still retained. From a zeal for his new religion, laws were made in favour of Christians. Riches and honours were heaped upon them, especially upon their teachers. With their wealth they became proud and impatient of contradiction. Christianity was of course turned into an art of gain and a system of contention : and so things went on from bad to worse for a thousand years, 'till at the dawn of *the reformation*, this heavenly religion, by the corruptions and inventions of men, all supported by human laws, was, in many instances, sunk below heathenism. At this happy period, the system of gross error, which had been introduced by degrees, received a violent shock. The first reformers, with a spirit becoming Christians, renounced all human establishments. They acknowledged no *master* but Jesus. They maintained their right to judge for themselves, and to believe and obey God alone. In the words of the immortal Chillingworth, ' the Bible, the Bible was their religion.' And brotherly love was for some time, their bond of union. For such a noble effort in favour of Christian liberty, and at the greatest risque, we cannot be sufficiently grateful to their memories. How happy for their posterity, had they persisted steadily in these principles ! but alas, how soon did the gold become dim ! it cannot be thought, without falling into the

* How strong a proof does this fact give at once of the excellence of the Gospel, and the vanity of all human establishments, that this religion, in its native simplicity, and by the evidence it carried with it, without riches, force or human laws in its favour, baffled all the cunning of the heathen Priests, the learning of the Poets and most of the Philosophers, the authority of lawgivers and the force of arms ! A rational conviction of the truth of Christianity prevailed over the fury of Princes gratifying the cruelty of established Priests.

the mistake which they opposed, that they arrived at perfection in their religious sentiments, or got clear of all the mistakes that had crept into Christianity. And yet they acted as if this had been the case. Having thrown off one human establishment, they in a short time settled another. While they continued upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone, they grew up into an holy temple in the Lord. While they acted towards one another, and to all men, like brethren; while they made truth, reason and the Bible, the only weapons of their warfare, they were more than conquerors: the frightful spectres of Popish darkness fled before them, like the morning cloud before the rising sun. But when, by these apostolic methods, the reformation had arrived at a very considerable height, the reformers laid aside the only instruments of their success, and sheltered themselves under human laws. How fatal a mistake, when the experience of ages had demonstrated the laws of men in these things to be a refuge for lies, much oftener than for truth!

This cause immediately produced its natural effects among Protestants in all places. Instead of carrying on the reformation, which they had so gloriously begun, they naturally quarrelled among themselves about what they would establish, or to pull down one establishment, and erect another. As success in this did not depend upon their having truth or common sense in their favour, but upon their possessing external power and wealth, so the most artful part of the Clergy made their court to weak Princes, and were the ready tools of executing their worst measures. These, in return, established their notions, whether true or false. Such laws were enforced by suitable penalties; which rendered Protestants more dreadful than bears and wolves to one another.—Whenever any party, incensed by former bad treatment, had it in their power to retaliate, senseless articles, or unchristian terms of communion were enjoined: which were still rejected with justice by great numbers. Hence fines, imprisonments, &c. inflicted upon the best Christians for the crime of obeying God rather than men. This made Protestants of every name the objects of contempt to the Papists, and furnished the only arguments that could be urged against them. This every one knows, this our fathers felt to be the state of religion thro' the most of the reigns of the weak, tyrannical race of the Stuarts. And pray, how much was this better than Popery in the most corrupt periods?
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the Pope with his Council, invested with the authority of the laws, declared whatever they pleased to be articles of faith, which all others must believe. They made whatever terms of communion came into their heads. To both of these whoever did not assent, was fined, excommunicated, imprisoned, or murdered, as the spiritual court determined. But if all this was done by nominal Protestants, is it one whit the more easy that the name is changed? where is the mighty difference between Popery without a Pope, and Popery with a Pope? the tyrant indeed is altered, but the tyranny is the same. In this case, there is, in truth, no medium. A man is either to judge for himself in religious matters, or others are to judge for him. Whoever believes the former and reduces it to practice, is a Protestant indeed. Whoever submits to the latter is in fact a Papist, whether his Pope has one head or many heads, whether he be dead or alive, whether he be clothed in white linen or black woollen, whether he dwells in Italy, England or Scotland. For these are all but accidental circumstances that never enter into the merits of the cause.

You charge me with having inveighed against ‘all collective bodies of men in making articles of faith.’ And if it had been said, that they have no right to make articles for any but themselves, it would have been nothing but the truth; and a truth too of the last importance. Unless we lay *another foundation* than that is laid, which is *Christ Jesus*, there can be no authority in matters of faith but what consists in the force of argument, and the power of persuasion; and every one must judge for himself whether these arguments are convincing or not. And therefore, the decrees of an Assembly, Council or Convocation, signify no more to the world than this, that the majority of the Clergy at that time believed such an opinion to be true, and its opposite to be false, but truth is eternal and unchangeable. The majority are sometimes for it, and often against it. If we attend to the history of the Christian world for seventeen Centuries past, all Protestants are agreed, that for about 1300 years of this time, a great majority of the Clergy and laity combined against the truth in support of error. If then we may judge of what is to come from what is past, Protestants should observe this rule upon their own principles, that as often as opinions are proved by a vote to be true or false, the minority shall be declared to be *right*.—This, we all acknowledge, has been the case for more than three fourths of the time since the publication of the Gospel. And therefore,

therefore, there are three to one, that this would be the safest way of proceeding. The reasons why the majority of every convocation generally determine against the truth, might be easily unfolded from their characters. The bulk of them are upon different accounts, much better disposed and qualified to count noses than to weigh arguments. But what has been said is enough to satisfy an impartial mind, that, until a Christian be convinced of the truth and justness of the decisions made by collective bodies of men, their authority cannot oblige him to believe them : and consequently, their authority amounts to nothing. A rational assent to any opinion must depend entirely upon the evidence that supports it.

That the Church of Scotland cannot be defended, so far as it is a parliamentary constitution, is sufficiently evident. If it be true in South-Britain, that men have no right to be *masters* in Christ's kingdom, or to make laws in religion that are binding upon their Christian brethren, it must be equally true in North-Britain. And that no civil establishment of any human system, is, or ever can be consistent with genuine Christianity, appears from hence, that the legislative power will never establish any system of opinions but what the members, or the prevailing party, believe to be true. And therefore, until they become infallible, their mistakes will be established upon the same footing with the most important truths : the consequences of which are to the last degree ruinous to the interests of virtue and true religion. The Clergy, under such a constitution, must never more find any doctrine in the Bible but what is in their established system. If they should see the former directly contradicting the latter, they must not believe one word of it. Whatever the Bible teaches, it is their business to think, speak, preach and pray according to what is enjoined upon them by the head of their church, the legislative power. Why then should they pretend to study the Bible ? they have nothing to do with it.

Every attempt they make of this kind is only an impertinent intrusion upon what does in no degree belong to them. Accordingly such gentlemen as don't attend to this, but take upon them to think for themselves, are generally punished for their presumption by the odium of the people and the rancour of the clergy : which are naturally expressed by deposition from their office, &c. Whatever the established Clergy in South or North-Britain, may see cause to *believe*, their sole province is to profess
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the doctrines and observe the directions of their national standard. Their constitution supposes, that the Bible was well enough studied at the reformation to serve to the end of the world. But are these the Lord's freemen, or the servants of the state? the answer is obvious. Nevertheless the bulk of the clergy hug these chains, because they enable them to rivet their own fetters upon the minds of the people. And what a scene of ignorance, bigotry and vice naturally follows! how great a pity, that the religion of Jesus, in itself so excellent, should be thus perverted! in short, from men's violating Christ's fundamental law, and claiming to have authority in his kingdom, have proceeded the most horrid crimes of which human nature is capable, the fiercest contentions, the most cruel murders, &c. and this exactly in proportion to the degree in which this Anti-christian claim has been made. Since the revolution, 'tis true, the British dominions have not felt this. An establishment, by which no injury is offered to those who think fit to dissent from it, is with regard to them, no establishment. The genuine fruits of human establishments have been greatly restrained by the *Act of Toleration*. Every one, however, may see, that they have appeared as far as this will permit. Men of different opinions, or modes in religion, have not, since that memorable æra, cut one another's throats, because they dare not. But mutual animosities have been still maintained. Too many of all sects, by a bigotted attachment to one establishment or other, to that of Rome, England, or Scotland, have forgotten the distinguishing character that Jesus gave of his true followers, viz. mutual love. One would rather conclude from the conduct of some professed Christians, that their Lord had commanded them to hate, excommunicate and persecute each other as far as the laws of the land would permit. To the disgrace of Protestant-Dissenters, none are more guilty in this particular. This arises from the abuse of the liberty they are blest with, and is not mentioned to expose, but to reform them. What can become of them while they act so inconsistently as to dissent from one human establishment, and then insist themselves under another, with which the inhabitants of Ireland have nothing to do? if it be true, that the disciples of Christ are not obliged to believe or profess any article in the Church of England which is contrary to sound doctrine, is it not equally true with regard to the Church of Scotland? how are WE concerned with the one more than with the other? we are obliged by a higher authority than their's to receive the truth, and we should submit to nothing else.

The peculiar principles of Protestant-Dissenters are, that Jesus Christ is the only Head, King or Lawgiver in his church, that all the members of this church are obliged by his authority to receive and profess what appears to them to be the truth, and that they ought not to injure one another for so doing, but on the contrary, to live together in peace and brotherly love. These principles are evidently for the honour of human nature and the happiness of society, as well as for the advancement of true religion. These are principles which men of the finest sense or fortunes need not be ashamed to espouse. If Protestant-Dissenters act up to the full extent of them, their name will be honourable in the esteem

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of all whose good opinion is worth having, and the world will be obliged to confess, that the God of peace and truth presides over them. It is only by deserting these principles, that they can dishonour themselves. And while, contrary to the very foundation of their dissent from the established Church, they attempt to lord it over one another's consciences, to make unscriptural terms of communion, and to enforce these by such penalties as they have in their power, that is, by excommunication and mutual reviling, they must and will divide and subdivide without end. This was the very thing that first divided Protestants. And the like causes will ever produce similar effects.

You remark, that all this was said, that I might *freely* publish and maintain my own pernicious principles.* But what should hinder *freedom* in this matter? is not liberty the honour and happiness of the land we live in? yes; the hands of persecutors are tied up. The ministers of the gospel may freely speak, and the people freely hear the truth as it is in Jesus, whatever bad names may be given to it. For this unspeakable blessing, next to him by whom *Kings decree JUSTICE*, thanks to William of glorious memory! thanks to the Illustrious House of Hanover! may heaven perpetuate this family to the latest generations, as the steady guardians of liberty, the faithful protectors of all their subjects' rights, especially of the sacred rights of conscience!

What has been said upon this subject does not arise from a groundless prejudice against any establishment, but is intended to show, that the Divines or Lay-men, who first settled or yet support these establishments, had no right to judge for us: that, however old or orthodox any of them may be reputed, yet the authority of Jesus is still greater. And if it can be made appear, that these old orthodox Divines will answer for us in the day of judgment, I shall be the more inclined to pay an implicit regard to their notions of things. But if it be true, that *every one of us shall give account of himself to God*, can any thing be more reasonable than that we should examine what we must answer for?

My principles you have thought fit to call *pernicious*, or destructive. And it may be supposed, that in all your objections taken together, you have mentioned those you judge most pernicious. But in what respect are they pernicious? do they tend to make us less pious or less virtuous? do they tend to render Mankind tyrannical Magistrates or rebellious subjects? ill-natured husbands or disobliging wives? careless parents or undutiful children? to be more particular, which of these two principles has the most direct tendency to engage our love to God, to believe that he first loved us *certainly and unquestionably*, and still maintains the most benevolent designs towards us; or, that he hated us before we were born for what we had no hand in nor could possibly prevent, and perhaps created us only to make us dwell with everlasting burnings?—Whether is the mind best prepared to exercise a constant watchfulness over its actions, which is convinced, that God has decreed to make it happy or miserable according to its conduct; or that mind, which is persuaded, that this matter is long ago fixed with regard to every individual, that 'the number of the elect and of the reprobate is so certain

* Westminster Confession.

and definite that none can be added to or taken from it*? Upon what consistent principles can the person, who really believes that God has unalterably determined to make him happy or miserable, give himself the least trouble about his thoughts or actions, or be at all concerned about what he does or neglects; may he not justly reason in this manner? 'if the unchangeable God has decreed to make me wretched to all eternity, can my most diligent endeavours cause any alteration in this matter? if he has resolved otherwise, will my wickedness break his decree? no certainly. Neither vice nor virtue will make the least difference. Why then should I take any thought or give myself the smallest trouble to no purpose? let me add drunkenness to my thirst, let me pursue every humour and fancy without the least distinction, or the pain of self-denial; for to-morrow I die: and God will send me to heaven or hell as he has already fore-ordained'. Does not this doctrine fairly destroy all the motives to virtue or discouragements from vice that are taken from a future state?—Whether does it give us the highest sense of the wisdom and goodness of our *Creator*, to be assured that he *forms* us all *right*; or, that we come into being in a *wrong* state and in great disorder?—Whether is it most likely we shall keep all our passions under subjection to the obedience of Christ, when we believe, that our Maker has created us capable of this, and is still certainly disposed to encourage us in it; or, when we are of opinion, that we are made wholly inclined to all evil, and disabled from any thing that is good*, until God works a miracle upon us, which, if he intends us for misery, he will never do? upon the former principle may he not justly require virtue and obedience from us? upon the latter, can he reasonably look for any such thing? can he expect what, upon this supposition, he must know, we are not able to do?—One man is convinced that according to the use or abuse of the powers and faculties bestowed upon him, God is either pleased or displeased so as to make him happy or miserable; but another is of a contrary opinion, that God pays no regard to the use or abuse of our faculties, whether we improve our Lord's talent or bury it in the earth; now, which of these two, may it be naturally expected, will act the most worthy and useful part in any of the connections of social life?—Whether is he in the best way to know the will of God and to do it, who is warmly attached to whatever happens to be the *orthodox* religion in the country where he is born; or he that impartially looks into all parties, resolved to receive nothing as the truth of God but what he sees bearing the stamp of divine authority, either by reason or revelation?—Or, when two men are raised to supreme power, but of such opposite principles, that the one has a strong sense of full, impartial, divine liberty; that, by the same reasons which convince him of his right to think for himself, he is fully persuaded, that others have the same right; and that, in consequence of this, he cherishes all men of virtue and capacity: while the other imagines himself by his high station impowered to prescribe to all his subjects what they shall believe and profess in religion: which of these two, acting up to their principles, will execute the trust reposed in them with the greatest equity? will

* Westminster Confession,

not the one be naturally esteemed as the father of his country, the darling of his people, the constant subject of their hearty prayers and sincere thanksgivings ? but must not the other, offering violence to the minds of men, meet with the keenest opposition, and, continuing to exert his power, enrich the soil with the blood of those he ought to protect, 'till at last he falls a victim to the just resentment of his injured country ? we are told of a tyrant in Syracuse, who put all his guests into his own bed to see if their size exactly suited it, who in this case treated them kindly : but if they had the misfortune to be taller or of a lower stature than himself, he lopped so much from their limbs, or stretched them out upon the rack. This we generally detest. But if a King believes, that it is his duty and that he has divine authority to take heed that all his subjects think and act in religion as he judges to be most agreeable to the word of God ; * and if he is influenced by this opinion, must he not exercise a far more detestable tyranny, a tyranny over the mind, equally inconsistent with true policy and true religion ?—As the clergy are concerned in civil establishments of human schemes, whether are *they* placed in circumstances most favourable to knowledge and integrity, who are obliged by law to adhere in every thing to creeds composed by men just emerging out of popish delusions ; or *they*, who are bound by no such ties, whose only business it is to study the Bible and teach what they find there ?

It would be tedious to compare the tendency of all the principles which you and I have avowed. This alone, however, can make it appear which of them deserves to be called *pernicious*. This indeed is a touch-stone that should be applied to every principle. The *tendency* of it should be fairly considered : whether it be for the honour of God, or reflects disgrace upon him ; whether it tends to make men love God and delight in his government, or really excites hatred and aversion towards him, with almost a secret wish that there were no such being in the universe ; whether it be naturally calculated to promote truth or error, virtue or vice, happiness or misery among men. In doubtful matters this will make the true light shine clear upon the mind. And if it can be shown, that my principles are *pernicious* to any thing but immorality, priest-craft and bigotry, I shall gratefully relinquish them.

You represent me as wanting to *impose* my principles upon the congregation. The injustice of this, it is hoped, will appear from your own objections. They make it evident, that, instead of attempting to impose any principles upon my hearers, I frequently recommended it to them to examine all things and hold fast that which is good. It may be also observed, that, after preaching upon 1 Cor. xv. 22, which might have led one fond of particular schemes far enough into them, you could fix upon no assertion in that sermon contrary to your own manner of thinking, but drew your objection upon it merely from my silence : which surely discovered no inclination to engage in controversy, far less, to *impose* any principles upon the congregation. Let it be judged from your own objections, whether I endeavoured to impose my principles upon any of you ; or whether you did not, on the contrary, expressly

* Westminster Confession.

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attempt to impose your's upon me, and to make me preach and practise whatever you dictated, under the penalty of incurring your displeasure ; and whether my refusing to obey your commands in this particular, was not the very cause of our difference.

Upon your desiring to observe the positive institutions of the gospel, did I ever ask any of you, whether you believed those things in which we differed ? or require any other thing of you than what the Apostle demonstrates to give an undoubted right to a place in the Christian Church, viz. *faith in Jesus Christ*, productive of its proper fruits ?

It would, no doubt, be the greatest tyranny in the Clergy, to impose their opinions upon their hearers. They ought to be content with proposing the evidence for what they take to be truth. But is it not equally unjust in the laity to insist upon their ministers being of the same opinion with them ? Is it not one design of his appointment to instruct them ? but how can this be done, unless they consider his arguments with coolness and the love of truth ? and if they should not see his reasoning in any instance to be conclusive, ought they not still to esteem him as an honest man and their friend ? why should people suddenly pronounce any new light they may hear from their minister to be error ? is there not still a possibility that they themselves, or their favourite authors may be mistaken ? and is it not most probable, that these mistakes shall be first observed by men whose employment it is to study human nature and the Bible ? but Mr. Pope's remark is abundantly confirmed by daily experience.

*New truths would you teach, or save a sinking land ;
All fear, none aid you, and few do understand.*

Can it be supposed then, that any man of common sense would involve himself in the train of evils that generally follows a suspicion of new light in a minister, but from a desire to instruct the people committed to his charge ? and should not this intitle him to a fair hearing ? without a disposition to learn, how shall men be delivered from any mistake they labour under ? how little do the laity consult their own improvement, when they revile and fly from their best friends, and care for those who prudently *think with the wise and speak with the vulgar* ! they reap the fruit of their doings. When they shut out the light, they must sit in darkness. For freedom of speech in the ministers of the gospel, and freedom of judgment in their hearers, with mutual love and condescension, are the only means by which error and heresy can be banished out of the Christian world, or truth and integrity preserved or restored.

As I have always disclaimed *imposing principles*, so I earnestly recommend it to such of you as will pay any regard to my advice, never to submit to any imposition upon your consciences, under whatever disguise it may be concealed. *Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.* You will readily perceive that you ought not to separate yourselves from religious communion with those among whom you see mistakes. For if you do, where will you find a society against which the same objection may not take place ? not among fallible men. Unless they bear with one another's mistakes,

mistakes, they must *forfake the assembling of themselves together* for the worship of God. Let them rather have a little patience. The time is coming when *the tares shall be separated from the wheat*. When Jesus was in this world, he did not leave the communion of the Scribes and Pharisees, among whom he found the grossest corruptions in principle; but he endeavoured by reasoning with them to correct their mistakes. You need not be told, that you may follow his example with safety. And if any society with which you are willing to join upon the terms which Christ requires, a professed faith in him made credible by a virtuous life, refuses to admit you upon these terms, unless you also submit to terms invented by men, may you not be assured that the sin of division lieth at their door? *offences must come*, while there are men unreasonable in their demands and furious in their passions, *but woe unto that man by whom the offence cometh*. The crimes of murder, drunkenness or adultery are not more frequently or more solemnly forbidden in the New Testament than *divisions* among Christians: nor is there any thing capable of a clearer demonstration than this, that, in any church, they who require of their fellow-Christians *unscriptural* terms of communion, are the men by whom the offence cometh.

Now that I have wrote you this long letter, some of you may labour under various disadvantages in forming a judgment of the several particulars contained in it. And none of the least is the danger of being misled by those to whom you may apply for direction. They may perhaps tell you that these are dangerous principles. And dangerous they may be to their credit or interest. But don't be frightened with any such general answer. You have a right to see with your own eyes upon what account, or in what respect they are dangerous. And when they attempt this, take care that they speak plain English which you'll understand. Reason and common sense are the gifts of God to all men, tho' they may be almost extinguished for want of exercise. The bulk of mankind, however, are more capable of judging between truth and error than is generally imagined, if the materials are laid before them in a manner suited to their education and capacities. But the grand device of deceivers is to become unintelligible, like those artful birds, that, upon being close pursued, are said to embrace the first opportunity of raising a cloud of dust around them, that they may escape unobserved.

Care has been taken to express every thing with great clearness. But in the variety of opinions or texts here explained, there may be some so briefly touched upon as to be misunderstood; or there may be real mistakes, tho' I am not sensible of the particular instances. Should these occur to you, or be pointed out by others, if you please to put them in writing and send them to me, as often as my situation permits, I shall examine them with candour, and let you have the result of my labour with sincerity.

To live upon good terms with all my acquaintance, however differing from me in opinion or profession, is what I greatly desire. But there are men whose approbation I despair of obtaining, that is, all assuming Priests, with the dupes of their presumption. Nor is the friendship of such men worth having, because it is enmity with God. False teachers are the
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natural enemies of all reformation: and this, for an obvious reason.— Their authority and wealth depend entirely upon the ignorance and superstition of the laity. A reformation in the sentiments of men dissolves the charm, strikes off the chains of slavery, and turns all their glory into a fading flower. Our Lord with his disciples attempted a reformation in Judea; but no sooner did they begin that glorious work than the Chief Priests were in arms against them, and never ceased till they shed innocent blood. In the same manner did the heathen world oppose the teachers of Christianity, and for the same reason. The case was exactly the same when Popery prevailed all over Christendom. The witnesses for the truth were obliged to prophesy in sack-cloth. And the first reformers were all persecuted by the main body of the Clergy. Such false teachers artfully address themselves to the prejudices, obstinacy, weakness and simplicity of the people, in order to carry on their own designs. There is a passage in the history of the Acts that sets the character and influence of such men, with the means by which they succeed, in a true light. Ch. xix. 24—32. Here we are informed, that an artful, self-interested man, named Demetrius, perceiving the tendency of the Apostles doctrine to abolish the received religion, with the profits accruing to him from it, convened his fellow-craftsmen, and used every argument to enflame their rage against these reformers. *Ye know, says he, that by this craft we have our wealth.* He takes care also to display the impiety of the Apostles attempt, that he might kindle the religious zeal of his brethren; so that, he adds, *not only is our craft in danger of being set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, & all her magnificence destroyed.* And to raise this passion still higher, he does not forget to remind them how generally Diana was adored, even by all Asia and the world. This address produced the desired effect. *When they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, great is Diana of the Ephesians.* This outcry of the craftsmen soon alarmed the body of the people, and the whole city was filled with confusion, though we are told, that *the greater part knew not wherefore they were come together.* And had it not been for the temper, spirit and humanity of the town-clerk, who exerted himself to suppress the tumult, it is more than probable, that Paul, with his companions, would have been torn in pieces.

How often has this scene been acted over again since that time?—facts will lead any impartial observer to believe, that more of those, who profess to be the pillars of truth and the patrons of piety in the Christian world, have been bred in the shop of Demetrius than in the school of Jesus. Whenever their Diana is attacked with any freedom, and shown to be an idol substituted in the place of the living and true God, the *silver-smiths* never fail to make an uproar. *They are full of wrath, in the cloke of religious zeal, and extol their great Diana, proving their assertions by this all-commanding argument, that she is worshipped by great numbers.* And it is very possible, that, in such courses, they may not only persuade others, but themselves, that they are the favourites of heaven. When men receive not the truth in the love of it, they are justly given up to strong delusions. *There is a generation that are pure in their*

their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness. The Prophet Micah, describing the extreme corruption and degeneracy of the Jews in his time, observes, ch. iii. 11, that *their Priests taught for hire, and their Prophets divined for money*, their principal view was to enrich themselves; and yet, says he, with just wonder and astonishment, *will they lean upon the Lord, and say, is not the Lord among us? none evil can come upon us.* Men of this perverse character, among whatever party of Christians they are found, exactly resemble those spoken of by Jesus Christ, that would neither enter into the kingdom of heaven themselves, nor suffer those that were going, to enter in. There is but one way to be secure against the artifices of such gentlemen: and that is, not to imitate the people of Ephesus by joining in the outcry, without knowing what it is about, but to consider, that these men are your brethren, and deserve credit no farther than, with meekness and wisdom, they advance solid reasons to support their pretensions. Follow the example then of the Bereans, of whom such honourable mention is made, Acts xvii. 11, *because they searched the scriptures daily whether the things which the Apostles spoke were so.*

And now that I have assumed the delicate province of an adviser, permit me to mention a few things that deserve the particular attention of those who see the absurdity of opinions they once held sacred.

One fatal extreme of which such men are accused is, that they throw off all regard to every principle, and look upon every opinion as doubtful or insignificant, and being bound by no fixed principles, become wicked and ungodly in their lives. And it must be acknowledged, this dreadful consequence may follow in a mind that does not think enough, or that is already engaged in vicious pursuits. Deism, or the denial of revealed religion, is said upon this account to prevail in France. That polite people, in this age of intellectual refinement, can readily discern the absurdity of their established religion, and justly conclude that it cannot be from heaven. But being too volatile to examine the difference between their own superstition and the holy scriptures, they rashly renounce both together, taking it for granted that they are the same.— This observation is equally applicable to those Protestant-Churches that yet stand upon the creeds and confessions collected from the popish writers about the time of the Reformation. Some of the trimmings of popery were then torn off, but the body was still preserved. Now, is there not a real and wide difference between the religion which God has revealed, and the corruptions that have been mixed with it in dark ages, and hitherto supported by a combination of earthly power and policy? can any thing merit closer attention from a rational mind than to detect and renounce these corruptions? but while this is done, should we not still preserve a just and high regard for pure, undefiled and practical religion? genuine Christianity you will find altogether lovely, worthy to descend from the Author of every good and perfect gift, attested by the most faithful witnesses, and sealed by the striking evidence of miracles, with prophecies that are abundantly confirmed by the revolutions of following ages. Let this divine religion, therefore, be cordially embraced and duly attended to, while the human mixtures that have obscured its glory are entirely rejected. In

In doing this, however, you may expect to meet with opposition and discouragements. Tho' your lot hath fallen in peaceful days and in a happy land, where the higher degrees of persecution are not permitted, yet, after taking all care to have your understandings enlightened with the knowledge of Christ, you may be pointed out as *Heretics* and enemies to the Gospel. But ill names you must learn to regard as empty scarecrows that should frighten none but children. In these the faithful servants of Jesus have cause to rejoice. In what animating strains does he address his followers, Mat. v. 11. 12, *Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake; rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven.*—The Apostle Paul was not ashamed to declare in a publick defence of himself, that after the way which his countrymen called *heresy*, he worshipped the God of his fathers. The men of this world called the master of the house *Beelzebub*: and shall not they of his household receive the same treatment? *whosoever will come after me, says Christ, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me.*

Is it necessary to put you in mind, that the exercise of good affections, with a virtuous life, is the great design of all knowledge? that without this, the highest attainments of the understanding are no better than perfect ignorance? nor the most laborious study of the scriptures more profitable than any common amusement? it is hoped you have not so learned Christ as to be strangers to this. Should your religious sentiments, after a careful enquiry, differ from the generality of your neighbours, you are still under stronger obligations to be blameless and without rebuke, that they of a contrary party may be ashamed to revile you, having no evil to say of you. For it appears from many instances in common life, that orthodoxy covers a multitude of sins, but the smallest grain of imagined heresy magnifies every failing into a crime. *Let your light therefore so shine before men, that they seeing your good works, may glorify your heavenly father.* As you profess to be the disciples of Jesus Christ, never contradict this good profession by any part of your conduct. Let his doctrine be the only standard of your faith, his precepts the rule of your lives, his example the constant pattern of your imitation, his spirit your guide, and his second coming the subject of your joyful expectation. If ye do these things, ye shall never fall from the favour of God, nor the happiness connected with it. You may possibly be treated in this world like your Master, but consider for your comfort that you cannot be treated worse. He hath shewn you how to overcome the world.—And if you are followers of him by a patient continuance in well-doing, when he appears in the glory of the heavenly hosts, surrounded with attending angels, he will pronounce the final and decisive sentence in your favour, *come, ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world.* Then shall the righteous go away into life eternal, in the enjoyment of which they shall shine like the sun in the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever.

Finally, brethren, farewell: be of one mind, agree in affection, live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you.

That

That ye may approve the things that are excellent, that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ, is the fervent prayer of your faithful Friend,

JOHN NELSON.

DUBLIN, July the 4th, 1766.

The EDITOR to the PUBLIC.

ALTHOUGH truth, as such, ought to be received on it's own evidence, or on approving itself to the understanding and judgment; and consequently our knowledge or ignorance of a writer ought to have no influence on our minds, in points of reasoning and argumentation, yet there is a general fondness in men to know something of an author, whose works they peruse; as—who he was—where and when he lived—what his character was—what his fortune in the world, &c.

To gratify, in some measure, this natural curiosity, and to shew respect to the memory of the sensible and ingenuous writer of the foregoing tract, it is thought proper to inform the public, that the Rev'd Mr. JOHN NELSON was born in the parish of Bellyaughran, in the county of Londonderry, in the North of Ireland—that he received a liberal education at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland; and was afterwards settled a Dissenting or Presbyterian minister in a church at Ballykelly—where he sustained an unblemished character, and was highly esteemed by the sensible and virtuous part of his acquaintance—But being of a tender constitution, and meeting with discouraging troubles from some of his people, he saw fit, after a few years, to resign his charge.—Having quitted the ministry, the state of his health, and a desire of being still beneficial to mankind, led him to the study of physick. While retired to prosecute his studies of this nature, it was, that he wrote the foregoing letter to his people; and soon after yielded to the earnest solicitations of a near relation and intimate friend, Mr. — Mears, Captain of the Egmont Indiaman, and entered as chief surgeon of his ship, on a voyage to the East-Indies—too difficult and arduous an undertaking for so tender and delicate a frame—A few days after his arrival on that continent, it pleased the supreme disposer of all human events to put an end to his valuable life, in the year 1766, and in the 28th of his age: and thereby to cut off the hopes and expectations of his friends, as to his farther usefulness in the world.

That

